THE POLITICAL RESURGENCE OF THE MILITARY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Conflict and leadership

Edited by Marcus Mietzner

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The Political Resurgence of the Military in Southeast Asia

In the late 1990s, prominent scholars of civil-military relations detected a decline in the political significance of the armed forces across Southeast Asia. A decade later, however, this trend seems to have been reversed. For example, the Thai military launched a coup in 2006, the Philippine armed forces expanded their political privileges under the Arroyo presidency, and the Burmese junta successfully engineered pseudo-democratic elections in 2010.

This book discusses the political resurgence of the military in Southeast Asia throughout the 2000s. Written by distinguished experts on military affairs, the individual chapters explore developments in Burma, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, and Singapore. They not only assess, but also offer explanations for the level of military involvement in politics in each country. Consequently, the book makes a significant contribution to the comparative debate about militaries in politics. Whilst conditions obviously differ from country to country, most authors in this volume conclude that the shape of civil-military relations is not predetermined by historic, economic, or cultural factors, but is often the result of intra-civilian conflicts and divisive or ineffective political leadership.

Marcus Mietzner is Senior Lecturer at the School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University. He is the author of *Military Politics, Islam, and the State in Indonesia: From Turbulent Transition to Democratic Consolidation*.

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Preface

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The military has traditionally played an important role in many Southeast Asian countries. In Burma, for instance, the army has been the dominant political force in post-independence politics, presiding over various forms of direct military government since 1962. Similarly, Indonesia's armed forces lay claim to having achieved the country's sovereignty in the 1940s after a long and painful military campaign against Dutch colonial troops. From this contribution to Indonesia's creation, the military has extrapolated an eternal right to be involved in political affairs. Developing this belief into a comprehensive political and military doctrine, the armed forces took power in 1966 and remained part of Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime until 1998. Thailand, for its part, has seen numerous military coups since 1932, when army leaders overthrew the absolute monarchy. Viewing itself as the defender not only of the Thai nation but also of democracy, the army has intervened in politics whenever it deemed a civilian government corrupt, incompetent, or divisive. In Vietnam, the armed forces have been a core supporter of the communist regime and its fight against foreign aggressors: the French in the 1940s and 1950s, the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, and China in the late 1970s. While firmly subordinated to the hegemony of the communist party machine, the military has formed an important backbone to the latter's continued strength. Finally, the armed forces in the Philippines were decisive in the rise and fall of Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, the power of the military in some of these nations seemed to be in recession. This apparent decline was reflected in the 2001 publication of Muthiah Alagappa's volume *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*. In that book, most authors writing on Southeast Asian countries registered a decrease in the military's political influence. In Thailand, for example, a new constitution was adopted in 1997 after the army had politically discredited itself in the early 1990s. After decades of military meddling in political affairs, the country seemed finally on a good path to solid civilian governance. In the same vein, the Philippines had stabilized under the rule of Fidel Ramos between 1992 and 1998, making the military less important as a power broker. While a former general himself, Ramos managed to marginalize the military more effectively than his much-admired but weak predecessor, Corazon Aquino. In Indonesia, despite the chaos surrounding

the post-authoritarian transition, the military was no longer in the driving seat. The country had a democratically elected president for the first time in its history, and the military struggled to come to terms with the impacts of democratization, especially the constant waves of public protest and a highly critical press. Overall, then, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that the political influence of the military in the region was waning.

But then came the Thai coup of 2006. All of a sudden, the military was back on the political stage, and not only in Thailand. In the Philippines, the post-Ramos period turned out to be so unstable that the military found entry points to strengthen its political role. As it had done in 1986 when it deserted Marcos, the Philippine military decided in 2001 to withdraw its support from President Joseph Estrada, who was engulfed by corruption allegations and widespread popular protests. The main beneficiary of this decision by the military, Estrada's successor Gloria Arroyo, rewarded leading generals with cushy positions, more political power, and expanded resources. At the same time, the Burmese junta prepared the adaptation of a pseudo-democratic system, indicating that it now felt stronger than it had been in 1990, when a similar experiment had ended with a shock victory for the opposition under Aung San Suu Kyi. This time, there were no surprises: the junta-run party took the vast majority of seats in the November 2010 parliamentary 'elections', adding to the one fourth of seats that had already been reserved for the armed forces. The only exception to this trend of politically resurgent militaries across Southeast Asia seemed to be Indonesia, which consolidated its democratic system in the second half of the 2000s and continued to sideline the armed forces from political affairs.

This volume analyzes the political influence of Southeast Asian militaries since the publication of the Alagappa book in 2001. Presenting detailed case studies of Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, and Singapore, the chapters assess the level of military involvement in politics in each of these countries. For practical reasons, not all Southeast Asian states were included in this volume: Malaysia, Laos, Brunei, and Cambodia are not represented. While this does not imply that the civil–military relations of these countries are insignificant, I believe that the selected case studies cover a sufficiently wide range of regime types, historical legacies, economic systems, and religious affiliations. As far as regime types are concerned, the volume includes a military junta (Burma), presidential democracies (Philippines and Indonesia), a monarchy (Thailand), a communist regime (Vietnam), a one-party state (Singapore), and a parliamentary democracy (Timor-Leste). These nations also have highly diverse histories, ranging from deep military involvement in independence struggles (Burma, Indonesia, Vietnam, Timor-Leste) to negotiated transitions into nationhood (Singapore, Philippines) and complete absence of colonial rule (Thailand). In terms of economic development, the volume features the poorest state in Southeast Asia (Timor-Leste) and the richest (Singapore). Finally, the book discusses majority Catholic countries (Philippines, Timor-Leste), majority Buddhist states (Thailand, Burma, Singapore), and the nation with the largest Muslim population in the world (Indonesia). Thus, the country studies in

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this volume allow for the analysis not only of Southeast Asian trends, but of wider regional patterns as well.

In order to be methodologically consistent, contributors to this volume addressed a similar set of questions. All authors were asked to establish whether the military's political power in their focus countries has increased, remained stable, or declined since 2001. In addition, they were required to offer explanations for the change (or stagnation) that had occurred. To some extent, the sequence of the chapters reflects the result of this study: beginning with Burma, the country with the politically most powerful armed forces, the book discusses its Southeast Asian case studies in the order of their respective level of military engagement in politics. Obviously, there are gray zones of interpretation between some of the countries (for instance, it is difficult to quantify whether the armed forces' political influence in Vietnam is higher than in the Philippines), but the arrangement of the chapters nevertheless provides a rough guide to the extent of military influence in each nation. Preceding the country chapters is a comparative overview that summarizes the main findings of the individual studies, in both empirical and analytical terms.

Most importantly, the overview chapter connects this volume to the scholarly debate on military interference in politics. In essence, this volume warns against excessively structuralist approaches to explaining the extent of military engagement in a polity. One of the most prominent explanatory propositions in this regard, i.e. that the degree of military involvement in politics declines as a country's level of economic development rises, has not been substantiated by this study. For example, Thailand's military launched a coup at a time of continued GDP growth. In the same vein, Indonesia's per capita GDP has been only half of Thailand's, yet the former country successfully marginalized its armed forces from politics while the latter returned to its vicious cycle of military coups. Finally, Southeast Asia's poorest country, Timor-Leste, has not experienced the kind of military dominance that many observers had feared or economic path dependence theories had suggested. Other structuralist theories – whether related to historical legacies, international factors, or internal military dynamics – also found little application in this volume's case studies. Instead, most chapters pointed to failures of civilian governance as the main reason for increasing levels of military interference in politics. In turn, these deficiencies of civilian administrations were often not caused by structural predispositions (whether economic, historic, or cultural), but were the results of specific leadership characteristics of Southeast Asian prime ministers, presidents, or monarchs. Substandard or confrontational leadership, as in the case of the Philippines' Arroyo and Thailand's Thaksin, are difficult to grasp theoretically for comparative political scientists, but they have nevertheless been decisive in opening political space for the armed forces.

Many people have been involved in the production of this book, both directly and indirectly. First of all, I thank Peter Sowden of Routledge for coming up with the idea for the book and being patient throughout the long writing and editing process. Similarly, I am grateful to all contributors for enduring my repeated and uncompromising requests for revisions and updates. I am aware that this was difficult at times, but the end product should come as more than just a small

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consolation. Unlike many other edited volumes, which are often outdated by the time of publication, this book covers the most recent events in the various focus countries, including the May 2010 unrest in Thailand and the November 2010 elections in Burma. As I edited the book, I benefited from numerous discussions with outstanding experts on civil–military relations, including Aurel Croissant, Jun Honna, David Pion-Berlin, Ukrist Pathmanand, Alfred Stepan, Jürgen Rüland, Nicholas Farrelly, Ron Huisken, Hugh White, David Kühn, Philip Völkel, Sidney Jones, Edward Aspinall, and Harold Crouch. In Indonesia, I thank Juwono Sudarsono, Agus Widjojo, Rizal Sukma, Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, Andi Widjajanto, Effendi Choirie, Khatibul Umam Wiranu, Andreas Pareira, Edy Prasetyono, and Kusnanto Anggoro for their friendship and their advice on military affairs in their country and beyond. Paul Hutchcroft, Edward Rees, and David Koh generously agreed to read some of the chapters and provided useful comments. Finally, I am deeply grateful to Samiel Laury for his continued encouragement and support.

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1 Conflict and leadership

The resurgent political role of the military in Southeast Asia

Marcus Mietzner

In 2001, Muthiah Alagappa's edited volume *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* evaluated the state of civil–military relations in 16 countries across the region. Despite significant differences between the analysed nations, the study diagnosed a general decrease in the political significance of the armed forces in East Asia. The Southeast Asian cases presented in the book seemed to confirm this trend. To begin with, Thailand had seen its last coup in 1991 and had marginalized the military since then. The Philippines had emerged successfully from the Marcos dictatorship and the post-authoritarian transition under Aquino, stabilizing politically and economically during the strong leadership of Fidel Ramos. Indonesia, for its part, was undergoing a messy democratic transition, but it had nevertheless ended three decades of Suharto's military-backed rule in 1998. In Vietnam, the military gradually adjusted to a new, less prominent role after decades of wars against France, the United States, and China. Finally, Singapore's semi-authoritarian, civilian regime remained in control of its large and modern armed forces. The only exception from the rule was Burma:[1] there, the military junta showed no signs of softening its repressive grip on the country that it had ruled more or less continuously since 1962. Overall, however, the Southeast Asian region appeared to go down the same road that Latin America had travelled in the 1980s and 1990s: sidelining the armed forces from politics and establishing functioning civilian regimes.

A decade later, however, the decline of the military's political role in Southeast Asia had been stopped, if not reversed. In Thailand, the military launched a coup in 2006 after mass protests had demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The coup failed to restore order, however. In 2010, Thailand saw the worst political violence since 1992, with more than 100 people killed and Bangkok's streets turned into a civil war zone. Similarly, the Philippines descended into chaos in 2001, with President Estrada removed in a violent popular uprising. His successor, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, became dependent on the armed forces, using them to secure victory in the 2004 elections and to survive subsequent protests against her rule. Southeast Asia's youngest nation, Timor-Leste, witnessed divisions in its military that contributed to widespread violence in the country in 2006 and 2007. The Burmese military government, not unsurprisingly, clung to power, despite organizing farcical parliamentary elections in November 2010.

Singapore and Vietnam, while not recording an increase in the political role of their militaries, could not report a decline in that role either. The only case that somewhat bucked the trend was ironically a country that had received very mixed reviews in Alagappa's volume: Indonesia. Under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the post-autocratic polity consolidated, and the previously all-powerful military watched events unfolding from the margins. Once decried as one of the most feudal and underdeveloped states in the region, Indonesia in 2010 suddenly stood out as the only country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that was considered a democracy by the Freedom House index (Freedom House 2010).

The discrepancy between the assessments made in the Alagappa volume and post-2001 developments raises questions about the reasons for this divergence. Why did Southeast Asia not continue on the path of declining military influence on political affairs, but instead experience a revival of the armed forces' role in politics? In the same vein, it is important to note that the evolution of Southeast Asian civil–military relations after 2001 not only defied the predictions implied by Alagappa, but also contradicted some of his key theoretical assumptions. According to Alagappa, the political power of the military rises (or declines) with the weight of coercion in governance. If governments rely mostly on coercion to establish their authority, the role of the military in politics is likely to be high. Conversely, 'when the weight of coercion in governance is low, civilian supremacy is likely to be the norm' (Alagappa 2001: 5). In turn, the 'weight of coercion in governance declines with increasing levels of economic development.' In other words, the extent of economic growth is a vital determinant of the levels of military interference in politics. Yet all countries in Southeast Asia that saw the influence of their militaries increasing after 2001 registered healthy expansions of their GDPs in the same period. Thailand, for example, was booming in the early years of the Thaksin government. In 2008, the Global Financial Crisis led to a temporary weakening of growth, but did not create serious disruptions in economic activity. Even Burma, while still plagued by poverty, grew its economy significantly throughout the 2000s. It seems, then, that the extent of economic growth is insufficient to explain the rise and fall of military influence in states that still undergo processes of democratic consolidation or have yet to begin such processes.

This volume takes stock of the dynamics of civil–military relations in seven Southeast Asian countries after 2001, and it offers explanations for the developments that have occurred in each state. Analyzing in detail the political role of the military in Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, and Singapore, the authors of the various country chapters assess whether the influence of the armed forces has grown, declined, or remained stable. Subsequently, they explore the reasons that could account for the changes or the stagnation. While each of the countries has very specific political, historical, religious, and social features, the chapters point to one dominant factor that caused military interference in politics to increase, fall, or stay the same: with the exception of Burma, failures of civilian governance and leadership in Southeast Asia provided entry points

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for military interventions, whereas stable civilian polities were able to keep the armed forces at bay. Civilian governance, in turn, became unstable not because of economic factors, but because key leaders sought to aggressively defend their positions against their opponents, causing polarization and escalating tensions. By contrast, inclusive, non-polarizing leadership, even if exercised in countries with low levels of economic development, managed to avoid the politicization of the armed forces. This volume, therefore, suggests that the extent to which militaries engage in politics is neither primarily related to the motivations, actions, or beliefs of the military, nor is it predetermined by a country's economic indicators. Instead, it is the quality of governance and the leadership approaches of key politicians that either stabilize a polity or make it vulnerable to military interference.

This overview of the volume introduces some of the main findings of the individual chapters, and locates them within the comparative debate on civil–military relations and the political role of armed forces. While not claiming that the results of this study provide the foundations for a new theoretical model that exhaustively explains military interference in politics, this chapter nevertheless offers the data from Southeast Asia as an invaluable addition to the scholarly debate on civilian control of the military. The conclusion drawn from this material, as indicated above, can serve as an important corrective to existing models and theories. The first section of this chapter discusses the state of civil–military relations in Southeast Asia after 2001, looking closely at military involvement in political institutions, the economy, military organization and domestic security, and society. The second segment tests the findings of the country chapters against several hypotheses that are usually advanced in the scholarly literature to explain the degree of military involvement in politics. These explanatory propositions include historical legacies, the quality of civilian governance and leadership, international factors, and internal military dynamics. The conclusion, finally, weighs the importance of these various factors and highlights the centrality of the quality of governance and leadership. It also examines how this emphasis sits with existing models of civil–military relations, arguing that approaches with a narrow focus on structural explanations of path dependence can particularly benefit from taking the evidence from Southeast Asia into account.

The political role of the military in Southeast Asia

Scholars have used a wide variety of methods to assess the depth of military involvement in political decision-making in individual states. One of these approaches has been to evaluate the level of civilian control in a number of key areas related to policy-making, especially in the defense and security sector (Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster 2002). Obviously, the stronger the capacity of civilians is to exert control in these areas, the weaker the influence of the military – and vice versa (Born, Caparina and Haltiner 2002). Defining 'full-fledged democratic civilian control' as a condition in which 'elected civilians enjoy institutionalized and uncontested decisionmaking power,' Croissant and Kuehn (2009: 190) have identified three main areas of concern: elite recruitment and overall public policy,

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national defense, and internal security. Other authors have expanded this set of vital arenas by including military organization (Chambers 2010). Most of these assessment criteria concentrate heavily on defense and security issues, however. As such, they overlook critical fields of military engagement, such as the economy and society at large (Philip 2001; Diamond and Plattner 1996; Brömmelhörster and Paes 2003). Consequently, this chapter analyses the extent of military participation in a country's political infrastructure by focusing on four main areas: the involvement of militaries in political institutions; their entanglement with the economy; their autonomy to manage their own affairs (including their ability to play a role in domestic security); and their engagement with society as a whole (Mietzner 2009). By investigating the level of military penetration of these four arenas of civil–military contestation, this volume aims to produce a comprehensive picture of the socio-political role of the armed forces in contemporary Southeast Asia.

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The military and political institutions

The most important avenue for militaries to seek influence on or dominance of policy-making is involvement in the political institutions of the state (Koonings and Kruit 2002). In consolidated democracies, military officers typically advise civilian politicians on defense matters and implement the eventual decisions made by elected public officials (Feaver 2003). Officers can also influence the political process by voting in elections, lobbying political parties and government officials, or shaping public opinion through media appearances and engagement with civil society organizations. In all of these activities, however, senior officers are expected not to openly contradict the viewpoints taken by their civilian superiors. When General Stanley McChrystal publicly criticized President Barack Obama for his Afghanistan strategy in a magazine in June 2010, even the president's opponents agreed that the most senior commander of US troops at the Hindu Kush had to go. By contrast, states with less consolidated democratic systems may witness much stronger military participation in political institutions through both direct and indirect means. These include the placement of military officers in the executive, legislature, and judiciary (either in the form of reserved representation or other mechanisms), the granting of emergency powers in conflict areas, a role for the armed forces in electoral management, or specific military institutions that 'parallel, supersede, or control the civilian administration' (Croissant and Kuehn 2009: 190). In addition, the military can possess formal or informal veto powers, whether guaranteed by the constitution or as a result of its coercive weight.

In Southeast Asia, military involvement in political institutions has ranged from complete dominance of the state to weak influence from the margins. As Susanne Nyein Prager's chapter in this volume explains, Burma has experienced the most extreme form of political hegemony by a military in Southeast Asia – and possibly in the world. Since 1962, the armed forces, or *tatmadaw*, have effectively run the state (Callahan 2003). Reinventing itself every decade or so in order to respond to changing political, economic, or ideological trends, military government in Burma

has taken the shape of direct junta rule, socialist one-party dominance, and – most recently – a heavily manipulated, pseudo-democratic polity. Between 1988 and 2010, the military ruled through its executive councils, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), not even bothering to create the impression of formal democratic procedures. A constitution was only re-introduced in 2008, in preparation for the junta's transformation into a semi-civilian administration led by retired and active military officers. In this new polity, which began to take shape after the November 2010 elections, former members of the junta hold the presidency and lead the strongest party in parliament, the USDP (Union Solidarity and Development Party). In addition, 25 percent of legislative seats have been reserved for the armed forces. And should these important power blocs still not be enough to protect the interests of the military, the constitution allows the head of the *tatmadaw* to take over power again if he deems the state to be in crisis.

In Thailand, the military's involvement in post-2001 politics has been less crude than in Burma, but it was extensive nevertheless. Pavin Chachavalpongpun's chapter demonstrates how the 2006 coup returned the armed forces into the center of Thai politics, making it once again the country's ultimate veto power. While the military has no reserved representation in the government or legislature, civilian governments rely heavily on its support (Chambers 2010). Pro-Thaksin governments installed in 2007 and 2008 were short-lived because they lacked military backing, while Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva owed his coming to power in December 2008 to intense lobbying efforts by the army. Moreover, the military oversaw the drafting of a new constitution in 2007, which weakened the role of democratic governments, decreed that almost half of all senators would be appointed instead of elected, and reinvigorated the role of the military. The constitution protects all generals involved in the 2006 coup from legal prosecution, and Article 77 stipulates that the 'state shall arrange adequate provision of military forces and modern weapons, ammunition, military equipment and technology necessary to protect and maintain national independence' (Lintner 2007).[2] Equally significant is the fact that Article 20 provides for the head of the King's Privy Council to act as temporary regent should the King be incapacitated or die without having appointed a regent. The current President of the Privy Council is Prem Tinsulanonda, a former general, prime minister, and widely viewed as the patron of the alliance between the monarchy and the military (McCargo 2005). The military is therefore likely to have a crucial say in the imminent royal succession in Thailand, the dynamics of which could define the shape of Thai politics for decades to come.

The Philippines have also recorded an increase in military influence on political institutions since 2001. Like in Thailand, the military in the Philippines is not granted reserved seats in parliament or cabinet, but President Gloria Arroyo's administration (2001–2010) offered generals more power and positions in exchange for their support. In his chapter, Aries A. Arugay describes how Arroyo appointed 12 generals to the post of armed forces chief of staff during her 10 years in office, subsequently shifting them into influential civilian posts after

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retirement.[3] By doing so, Arroyo managed to achieve two goals in one strike: she was able to reward a large number of ambitious generals with the military's top post and cushy post-service jobs, while at the same time preventing the emergence of a single powerful military leader who could challenge her rule. In addition to receiving senior posts in Manila, the military has effectively assumed the role of a parallel government in Mindanao, where separatist movements have fought for the independence of the majority Muslim area since the 1970s (Collier and Cook 2006). The escalation of the Mindanao conflict under Arroyo has given the armed forces extraordinary powers in the troubled territory, which they exploited to mobilize local support for the president's re-election campaign in 2004. Accordingly, Arroyo won Mindanao with a large margin, giving her a slight advantage over her challenger at the national level. When the manipulations became publicly known, however, the legitimacy of the Arroyo presidency was irreparably damaged, and she had to rely on the military even more heavily than before (Hutchcroft 2008).

In Vietnam and Singapore, military involvement in post-2001 political institutions has remained low but not insignificant. In Vietnam, the armed forces continue to have one member on the 14-member Politburo of the Vietnam Communist Party (VCP) elected in 2011, and 19 officers sit on the 175-member Central Committee. While not formally reserved for the military, these seats have traditionally been given to senior officers in order to maintain the close relationship between the armed forces and the VCP. Carl Thayer's contribution to this volume highlights that, despite a slight decline in the 1990s, the military's representation in key institutions of the party and state gives the armed forces a stake in the defense of the communist regime as it faces demands for greater economic and political liberalization. Similarly, Singapore's armed forces have remained clearly subordinated to the political elite organized in the People's Action Party (PAP). But, as Tan Tai Yong's chapter illustrates, the military continues to form an integral part of the regime, with an institutionalized and regular crossover between civilian and military elites. The current Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, was a brigadier general in the armed forces, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Teo Chee Hean, was previously a rear admiral. This fusion between civilian and military spheres allows Southeast Asia's most professional and best-equipped military to participate in decision-making processes without ever challenging the authority of Singapore's civilian political elite.

The only Southeast Asian country that registered a significant decline of military officers in political institutions after 2001 is Indonesia. In 2004, the military's reserved representation in parliament (38 seats at the national level and 10 percent of all seats in local legislatures) was abolished. At the same time, the number of retired generals elected to parliament as members of political parties dropped from 19 out of 550 in 2004 (3.5 percent) to only 12 out of 560, or 2 percent, in 2009.[4] In the same vein, less than 10 percent of all governors in Indonesia's 33 provinces in 2010 were retired generals, down from 40 percent at the time of Suharto's fall in 1998. This does not mean that the Indonesian military is no longer politically significant, however. President Susilo Bambang

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Yudhoyono is a retired general, as are four members of his cabinet appointed in 2009. While technically civilians, it is clear that former generals – not only in Indonesia – feel emotionally attached to their previous institution and thus instinctively protect the core interests of the armed forces. Nevertheless, for a country with four decades of military-backed authoritarianism under its belt, the gradual marginalization of officers from key political positions has been remarkable, especially given that other Southeast Asian nations have experienced the opposite trend (Mietzner 2009). It is also noteworthy that Timor-Leste, Indonesia's former province that seceded in 1999, has not witnessed its military dominating the new state. In contrast to many other newly independent nations emerging from armed conflict, Timor-Leste's former rebel army has not morphed into a repressive government. As Douglas Kammen shows in his chapter, the military has become an object of contestation for rival civilian camps, but it has not sought political hegemony for itself.

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Military involvement in the economy

Besides involvement in political institutions, ambitious militaries often seek engagement with the economic sector. This economic dimension of military interference typically comes in two different, but interrelated, forms: first, business activities aimed at raising off-budget funds in order to make the armed forces more independent of the state and create additional income sources for the officer corps; and second, military support for national development projects, which can increase the popularity of the armed forces and thus justify their role in governance (Brömmelhörster and Paes 2003). While the first type of economic activity includes military ownership of companies, cooperatives, and foundations, the second usually manifests itself in military development programs in the infrastructure, health, or education sectors. Scholars generally agree that economic activity by the armed forces undermines key principles of democratic civil–military relations, as it allows the military to plan independent operations funded out of its unofficial budget and thus bypass the state's civilian control institutions (Rieffel and Pramodhawardani 2007). Extensive engagement of the military in development also leads to the weakening of civilian capacity in this crucial area of governance, distorting the long-term perceptions of citizens *vis-à-vis* the appropriate roles of government and military in democratic states.

Throughout the 2000s, the economic engagement of Southeast Asian militaries has remained significant. In Burma, the military has for long been in control of the economy. In anticipation of the 2010 elections, however, the junta 'privatized' many state-owned businesses, giving them into the hands of senior generals and their cronies. This move guaranteed that, even in the unlikely scenario of the military losing some of its political clout in the post-2010 power struggles, the *tatmadaw* and its proxies will remain in charge of the economy. In Thailand, the 2006 coup was partially motivated by Thaksin's increasing monopolization of the economy, which hurt the financial interests of the military and royal elements coordinated by Prem (McCargo and Pathmanand 2005). But while Thaksin's

business empire was largely destroyed after 2006 and his opponents subsequently enjoyed better access to the economic infrastructure of the state, the Thai military does not seem to have profited financially from its political revival. With foreign investors responding negatively to the coup and the chaos that it triggered, some of the military's key assets suffered bad losses. For instance, the Thai Military Bank (TMB), which holds the bank accounts and investments of many senior generals, announced a Bt. 12.3 billion (US$ 410 million) financial loss for 2006, a negative swing of 257 percent from the Bt. 7.8 billion profit in the previous year.[5] The bank continued to make losses in 2008, and only recorded a modest profit of Bt. 803 million (US$ 26.7 million) in the fourth quarter of 2009.[6] Nevertheless, the Thai military remains a significant economic player, maintaining a vast network of businesses across the country.[7]

Vietnam and Indonesia, on the other hand, have launched initiatives aimed at the transfer of military businesses to the state. The VCP's Central Committee passed a resolution in 2007 that required all companies operated by the army to be placed under state management. There was a big loophole, however: the military was allowed to keep Viettel, a telecommunications company. Between 1999 and 2009, Viettel increased its revenues from a meagre US$ 2.1 million to US$ 3.2 billion.[8] With investments in Cambodia, Laos, and even Haiti, Viettel has turned into a competitive multi-national company, generating profits for the Vietnamese military and the state. In Indonesia, President Yudhoyono signed a presidential decree in 2010 that ordered military businesses to be taken over by the state. Like in Vietnam, however, there was a catch: foundations and cooperatives – the main mechanisms through which the military had engaged in the economy since the 1950s – were excluded from the planned transfer. This meant that only a tiny number of directly military-owned companies qualified for the take-over. Despite this half-hearted approach, the initiative had unexpected side-effects: fearing that the government would indeed force the military to surrender its businesses, senior generals sold off most of the lucrative businesses before the presidential decree was signed. As a result, only very few profitable business units remain in the hands of the armed forces. Overall, therefore, the economic engagement of the Indonesian armed forces has declined, with only around 20 percent of the military's expenditure raised through off-budget funding, down from 70 percent in 2001.[9]

In Singapore, the military is at the heart of a vibrant defense-industrial complex that supports the technological innovation of both the armed forces and society as a whole. With a budget that totaled US$ 8.7 billion (or 6 percent of GDP) in 2009, the armed forces have been able to nourish large-scale investments in research and industrial development. While not profiting commercially from these activities, the military has been an important link in Singapore's network of state-owned enterprises that foster employment creation and technology advancement. In the Philippines, by contrast, the military has never been an important economic actor. The armed forces have been financially dependent on the state, giving presidents ample opportunities to punish or reward senior generals by either granting or withholding government funds. Despite the absence of significant off-budget

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funding, some military leaders have managed to corrupt big amounts of money from state allocations or from kickbacks associated with procurement processes. As mentioned above, Arroyo has also shifted key generals into high-paid civilian jobs after retirement, compensating them for the lack of military businesses that could provide them with a satisfactory pension. The military of Timor-Leste, for its part, has not developed any meaningful businesses since the country's independence in 2002. However, the chronic under-funding and low professionalism in the armed forces has created an environment in which soldiers (as well as veterans who did not get a position in the army) seek non-military jobs from powerful politicians and entrepreneurs in order to maintain a stable income.

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Military autonomy and domestic security

One of the most important reasons for militaries to get involved in politics is their quest to control their internal affairs, monopolize defense policy, and play a role in domestic security (Pion-Berlin 1992; Trinkunas 2005). In all of these areas, the military typically believes that it possesses greater expertise than civilian politicians or – in the case of domestic security – the police. Peter D. Feaver (2003: 68) has stated that this is the result of 'information asymmetries in civil–military relations', with civilian authorities often lacking the technical knowledge to make informed decisions on defense and security matters. Militaries thus tend to seek political and economic influence in order to put them into a position of strength from which they can fend off attempts by civilians to impose their decisions and agendas on the armed forces. Especially issues such as force structure and size, strategic procurement decisions, senior military appointments, the design of specific operations, and the formulation of defense doctrines are highly sensitive fields in which most armed forces wish to have the first and final word. Even in consolidated democracies, this unavoidable clash between the constitutional authority of civilian, elected officials and the claim of generals to greater levels of expertise frequently leads to heated public debates about the proper place for politicians and soldiers. In the Southeast Asian region, however, it is at the center of power struggles between civilian and military elites over the control of state and society.

Needless to say, Burma's post-2001 military has remained in complete control of its internal management as well as all defense and security matters. With the military in government, civilians have been largely excluded from policy-making. In Thailand, the picture has been more complex. While the military has formally handed back power to a civilian government, its role in defense and security policy has been reaffirmed. All post-coup ministers of defense and their key staff have been active generals who have run the department without much interference by civilian politicians. The military has also been left in charge of handling the insurgency in Thailand's Muslim south and the difficult situation at the border with Burma, where ethnic refugees driven away by the junta and drug traffickers have destabilized security conditions for decades. Moreover, the military has also been at the forefront of the conflict with the pro-Thaksin red-shirt movement, shielding

the government from mass protests and demands for its resignation (Chambers 2010). Hence, civilian authorities have not only surrendered defense and security policies to the military, but they continue to rely on its support for their political survival. Similarly, the Philippines' armed forces have profited from weak civilian governments in the post-Ramos period to strengthen their role in defense planning and internal security. The military has been largely in control of Muslim Mindanao, and it has been given a free hand in quelling the ongoing communist insurgency. The government even did not rein in the military when its extrajudicial killings of leftist activists tarnished the international reputation of the Philippines, triggering criticism from the UN and Washington.[10]

In Vietnam, the military has been given extensive autonomy in exchange for its continued support of the communist regime. The minister of defense has traditionally been a general who also sits on the VCP Politburo. However, while the armed forces have been responsible for the overall defense of the state and the regime, the task of dealing with the political opposition and other internal security matters has largely fallen to the police and the Ministry of Public Security. Indonesia has also witnessed a decline in military influence on defense and security matters. Yudhoyono, while a retired general himself, has severely limited the military's ability to manage its own affairs, and the armed forces' role in domestic security has been gradually diminished in favor of the police. This shifting power balance between the military and police was compellingly reflected in the different responses to the appointment of new military and police chiefs in September and October 2010: while the public and political elite hardly took notice of the new armed forces commander, the nomination of the police chief triggered extensive maneuvring by political parties, the parliament, civil society groups, and media outlets. The military is now mostly focused on external defense, but even the defense ministry's own 2008 White Paper predicted that the country would not face any significant foreign threats in the foreseeable future (Departemen Pertahanan 2008). Similarly, the military has so far not been successful in wresting authority for counter-terrorism campaigns back from the police, which has been viewed as highly effective in fighting the militant Islamist network behind the 2002 Bali bombings and subsequent attacks (Fealy and Borgu 2005).

As part of the PAP regime, the Singapore armed forces have not enjoyed high levels of internal autonomy. The military has invariably accepted policy directives from government leaders, many of whom have served in high-ranking positions in the armed forces. Determining Singapore's defense policies and the strategic approach to its neighbors, the cabinet has been the undisputed decision-maker in security affairs. The military does, however, have a role in internal security: the government has ordered the armed forces to regularly patrol strategic points of the city state, assuring citizens, tourists, and foreign investors that Singapore is prepared for potential terrorist attacks. The military of Timor-Leste, by contrast, has lacked the resources and sophistication to become a serious player in defense and security affairs. Defense policy has not been a priority for either the armed forces or the government as a whole, with Timor-Leste struggling to make its young and volatile democracy work and

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satisfy the material needs of its citizens (Gunn 2010). While politicians have tried to drag the army into the intra-elite power struggle, the military has also not been heavily involved in internal security. The police and its paramilitary forces have been much more significant, with former Home Minister Lobato famously trying to develop them into his personal power base. The military's monopoly on violence has also been broken by a large number of veterans who have established private militias and allied themselves with politicians promising to promote their interests.

The military and society

The fourth and final main area over which militaries usually seek influence is that of civil society. Most armed forces are aware that public opinion or the pressure exercised by individual civil society groups can be vital in limiting or expanding the role of militaries in governance (Aguero 1995; Smith 2005). In non-democratic states, generals therefore try to control society through media censorship, repressive laws that curtail civil liberties, state-sponsored propaganda, and mandatory participation in military-run training courses. In democratic societies, the military may use more subtle methods, such as publishing newsletters, building relationships with non-governmental organizations, or hiring consultants who polish the image of the armed forces on their behalf (Feaver 2003). Whatever their approaches, armed forces can't exert influence on or establish dominance over a polity unless they find some way of getting society on board.

Not surprisingly, Burma's armed forces have imposed the strongest societal controls in Southeast Asia, using an extensive catalogue of repressive measures. In order to detect dissenters, the regime established the USDA (Union Solidarity and Development Association). An umbrella organization for all citizens affiliated with the state, it had 24 million members in 2007 before being transformed into a political party in 2010. In Thailand, the military has found it much more difficult to tame civil society. Media outlets and NGOs have generally been critical of the armed forces, and they have continued to scrutinize the actions of the officer corps even during times of military government. Most importantly, the victory for the pro-Thaksin opposition in the 2007 elections provided evidence for the failure of the Thai military to coerce society into supporting its political allies. The Philippines have had a similar experience. Despite their ability to steer weak civilian administrations into adopting policies favored by the military leadership, generals have faced a deeply hostile civil society and media landscape (Hedman 2006). Indeed, one of the main reasons for the habitual failure of successive military coups in the Philippines has been the strong opposition by society. In post-Suharto Indonesia, society has also played a strong role in keeping the military at bay (Nyman 2006). In particular, the media has put the spotlight on any development that could be read as an attempt by the military to stage a comeback, triggering noisy reactions from societal elements that ultimately strengthened the civilian polity. In the same vein, the military has lost its ability to intimidate NGO activists, forcing it to debate them in the media rather than beating them up in detention rooms, as was the practice under Suharto.

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In Singapore, the armed forces have developed a uniquely ambivalent relationship with society. On the one hand, male citizens are conscripted into military service and subsequently obliged to attend annual training courses. This has given the armed forces the chance of instilling their values in society (Teh 2005). On the other hand, society has shaped the military at least as much as the military has influenced society. As a citizen's army, Singapore's military has been exposed to processes of societal change and shifting values much more radically than any of its counterparts in Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, where males also get conscripted, the military has been less tolerant towards societal infiltration of its professional universe. Running military education courses in high schools and universities, the armed forces have made sure every citizen is aware of their contribution to the country's independence and its victory over foreign invaders. Nevertheless, the military's propaganda efforts have been conducted within an ideological framework set by the VCP, the continued and undisputed epicenter of politics and society in Vietnam. The army in Timor-Leste, for its part, has not gained the status in society that many of its leaders had hoped for. The heroic admiration of the population for Falintil, the rebel movement fighting against the Indonesian occupation, has not translated into similar respect for Timor-Leste's new armed forces. Idle and only making headlines with reports about disgruntled, under-paid soldiers and internal divisions, the military plays second fiddle to the politicians, businessmen, and police offers running independent Timor-Leste.

Explaining military involvement in Southeast Asian politics

The involvement of Southeast Asian militaries in political institutions, the economy, security, and society has varied greatly from state to state, but some general post-2001 trends are evident nevertheless. To begin with, two of Southeast Asia's most important states have seen significant increases in military power since the early 2000s: Thailand and the Philippines. In these two countries, the armed forces reasserted their position amidst declining political and security conditions, reversing developments in the previous decade that had marginalized both militaries. At the same time, military engagement in politics remained stable at a very high level in Burma and at medium levels in Vietnam and Singapore. Timor-Leste, a new entry to the club of Southeast Asian nations, has faced problems with building a professional military, but the armed forces have not turned into the dominant political player that some observers had feared they would become. Finally, only one country could record a decline in the socio-political influence of its military: Indonesia. This section explores the reasons behind the rise and decrease of military interference in Southeast Asian politics by testing four explanatory propositions often advanced in the scholarly literature on civil–military relations: historical legacies, the quality of civilian governance and leadership, international factors, and internal military dynamics (Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster 2002). This discussion will pinpoint the driving elements behind the change that has occurred in the region and, concurrently, contribute to the comparative debate on military intervention in political affairs.

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Historical legacies

Scholars of civil–military relations agree that the quality of democratic civilian control over the armed forces is to some extent the result of a country's specific historical legacies. These legacies can include the role the armed forces played in the state's struggle for independence from colonial powers, the depth of military involvement in pre-transition governments, or the mode of regime change (Alagappa 2001; Beeson 2008; Croissant and Kuehn 2009). In Southeast Asia, there are certainly traces of the importance of historical legacies in shaping civil–military relations: Burma's *tatmadaw*, for example, has played a key role in the country's independence war, and subsequently institutionalized its political involvement in the 1950s. Similarly, the Thai military has been a key political actor since 1932, when it overthrew the absolute monarchy. But while historical factors are vital, they cannot account for variations and fluctuations in the level of military involvement in particular periods of time. Crucially, Thailand has had phases of military marginalization from politics that defied historicist theories of path dependence – between 1992 and 2006, it had functioning civilian governments before the armed forces staged a dramatic comeback. In the same vein, the firm control over the military exercised by Philippines President Fidel Ramos in the 1992–8 period was followed by weak oversight under Presidents Estrada and Arroyo, with historical legacies unable to explain the difference.

One prime example of the weak explanatory powers of historical paradigms is Indonesia. When it was launched, the post-Suharto polity faced one of the most protracted histories of political military involvement in the world: the armed forces claimed sole credit for the nation's independence, had an institutionalized role in state institutions since the 1950s, controlled a vast network of territorial units, foundations, and cooperatives, and had imposed tight societal controls. Yet, by 2010, Indonesia was ASEAN's only democracy, the military was sidelined, and political conditions were stable. To be sure, the country underwent a messy and lengthy democratic transition (Mietzner 2009), but Indonesia's ability to dilute heavy historical legacies in less than a decade and establish firm civilian control over the armed forces has been nothing short of remarkable. There is no doubt that the persistence of the military's territorial command system and the continued practice of self-financing have – despite their declined significance – the potential to undermine the quality of Indonesia's democracy in the long term (Beeson and Bellamy 2008). But the fact that these deeply entrenched institutions and habits have not prevented the post-1998 democracy from stabilizing is in itself testimony to the secondary relevance of history to the shape of present civil–military relations. Indonesia's former province, East Timor, confirmed this pattern: despite Falintil's role in defeating the occupying power and leading the territory into independence, the armed forces did not gain supremacy over civilian actors in the new state of Timor-Leste. Instead, political parties and other civilian groups have engaged in an intense power struggle that made the armed forces an instrument – rather than an actor – in politics.

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The quality of civilian governance and leadership

Another explanation for the level of military intervention in politics focuses on the quality of civilian governance and institutions. Samuel E. Finer (2002), who argued that previous scholarship on military coups and politics was too preoccupied with the ambition and motivation of the armed forces, established this school of thought in the 1960s. In its current manifestation, this school advances three different approaches to explicate variations in civil–military relations. The first is concerned with the quality of economic governance and the general level of development. Arguing that satisfactory governance by civilians and the creation of a strong middle class close the door for military aspirations in politics, this paradigm links indicators of government performance with opportunities for the army to engage. For instance, Huntington (1996) calculated that countries with a per capita GDP of more than US$ 3,000 (US$ 4,790 in 2009 prices) have not seen any coup attempts. The second level of explanation is related to the degree of political cohesiveness in a society, with extensive polarization creating conflicts that invite military interference. By contrast, the existence of a societal consensus on key issues can fend off attempts by the armed forces to intervene (Finer 2002). In this model, militaries profit from the inability of civilian forces to establish functioning frameworks of political competition, with parties and leaders lobbying the armed forces to side with them against their opponents. The third approach, while related to the second, highlights the importance of personal agency and leadership in imposing solid democratic control on the armed forces. According to theorists of this school, the military can be excluded from governance even if economic conditions are unsupportive and deep political cleavages exist. What is important, then, is the effective management of such economic deficiencies and political divisions (Snyder and Mahoney 1999).

To begin with, the linkage between economic development and the level of military interference in politics has not been particularly prominent in Southeast Asia. While Croissant and Kuehn (2009: 209) have shown that this correlation remains generally relevant, it is not useful to explain the different outcomes across the region and country-specific variations in distinct phases. Thailand, for example, increased its per capita GDP from US$ 1,834 in 2001 to US$ 3,116 in 2006, the year of the coup (World Bank 2010). With this level of economic development, Thailand was well ahead of Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam, none of which witnessed serious military interference in politics in the second half of the 2000s. Indonesia, with a per capita GDP of US$ 2,349 in 2009, should be a prime candidate for high levels of military intervention, yet it has managed to keep the armed forces at bay. Similarly, Timor-Leste, which remains one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita GDP of US$ 492 in 2009, has successfully excluded the military from mainstream politics. By contrast, Singapore continues to involve the military in its societal infrastructure, despite being one of the richest nations across the globe (per capita GDP in 2009: US$ 36,537). Thus, while the economic approach can explain why countries such as South Korea, Taiwan,

Brazil, Chile, and Argentina have not experienced reversals of their democratic regimes (all of them had per capita GDP levels of above US$ 8,000 in 2009), it is less suitable to grasp the nuances of civil–military relations in Southeast Asia. Containing some of the richest and poorest countries in the world, the region has defied any attempts of generalization as far as a clear link between development and military engagement in politics is concerned.

In comparison to the economic development paradigm, the socio-political polarization model offers more insights into the Southeast Asian case studies discussed in this volume. Most importantly, Thailand's military staged its 2006 comeback amidst increasing conflict among the civilian elite. As a result of this conflict, the previous consensus on the democratic rules of the game (which had been enshrined in the 1997 constitution) collapsed dramatically. With elites no longer agreeing on even the most fundamental principles of democratic competition (such as the necessity of elections), the military found it easy to justify its 2006 intervention. Similarly, the political influence of the Philippine military increased proportionally to the rise in civilian elite conflict. After a period of stability under Fidel Ramos in the 1990s, the Estrada presidency heightened tensions in the political arena and civil society. Estrada's fall in 2001 after a popular uprising marked the beginning of the military's renaissance, which extended throughout the Arroyo presidency and into the early phase of Benigno Aquino III's rule. In the same vein, Indonesia's civilian leaders had driven Indonesia almost against the wall in 2001, leading to hopes within the armed forces that it could once again become a key political player. But the 2001 constitutional crisis instead forged an elite consensus on reforms that were required to fix the dysfunctional political system (Crouch 2010). This consensus produced a fairer electoral system, established effective mechanisms of political arbitration, and marginalized the military from politics. Since 2004, this new political framework has guaranteed political stability and, at the same time, the continued absence of the armed forces from high-level political decision-making.

While the quality of governance is directly linked to a country's level of elite cohesion, it is also a reflection of individual leadership styles. Demonstrably, bad leadership can throw new democracies into crisis and produce high degrees of military intervention, even if they have good economic foundations and favorable social indicators. On the other hand, measured political leadership can overcome difficult structural predispositions, such as economic underdevelopment and entrenched histories of military rule. As the chapter on Thailand in this volume shows, the crisis engulfing the country after 2006 was largely of Thaksin's own making. Despite an economic boom and two electoral landslides, Thaksin was not content with simply dominating the opposition. Instead, he sought an absolute monopoly on power, polarizing the political landscape and provoking the popular protest that eventually brought him down and the military back into the spotlight. In the Philippines, Presidents Estrada and Arroyo also squandered the stability achieved under Ramos, inviting the military back onto center stage. In Indonesia, by contrast, President Yudhoyono was able to create stable conditions by accommodating his political opponents and strictly observing institutional procedures. Despite trouncing his challenger in the 2009 presidential elections by a 34 percent

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margin, Yudhoyono maintained his moderate and inclusive leadership style. Consequently, Indonesia avoided the sort of conflict that had ripped Thailand apart and had triggered the military's take-over. In Singapore and Vietnam, authoritarian yet effective leadership upheld political stability as well, keeping the militaries in both countries under tight civilian control.

The importance of leadership was also apparent in the ability or failure of Southeast Asia's top politicians to contain internal violence. According to Michael Desch (1999), the quality of civilian control over the military is tied to the extent of domestic conflict in the state concerned. Armed insurgencies, for instance, lead invariably to more military autonomy from civilian control. In post-2001 Southeast Asia, the role of individual leaders in either escalating or ending domestic insurgencies has been striking. There is no doubt, for example, that Thaksin contributed significantly to the resurgence of the conflict in Thailand's Muslim south. In 2002, he abolished the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center, which had more or less successfully managed the conflict since 1981. Subsequently, the violence got out of control, with 4,200 people killed by November 2010.[11] In the Philippines, Estrada and Arroyo severely mismanaged the Mindanao insurgency after Ramos had mostly contained the violence through international mediation in the 1990s. The escalation of the conflict in the 2000s, which coincided with the revival of the communist rebellion across the country, was one of the main factors that drove the re-entry of the Philippine military into politics. In Indonesia, on the other hand, Yudhoyono discontinued the iron-fisted approach of his predecessors towards the Aceh problem, settling the decades-long conflict at the negotiation table in 2005 (Aspinall 2009). In all these cases, decisions by prime ministers or presidents were vital in determining the course of the conflicts and, by implication, the authority of the respective militaries to handle them.

International factors

In discussing the influence of threat levels on the shape of civil–military relations, Desch (1999) has focused not only on internal instability, but on external threats as well. In his view, civilian control over the military is weakest if both internal and external threat levels are high. If high external threat levels are coupled with insignificant internal threats, however, the quality of civilian control can still be strong. But while most Southeast Asian states battle internal insurgencies, only very few of them face serious external threats. One of them is Burma, which has viewed itself as being under threat from a US-led invasion since the early 2000s. As a result, the regime expanded its military and relocated its capital from Rangoon to Naypyidaw in the interior of the country. With insurgencies occurring in a number of Burma's ethnic states at the same time, it should thus not be surprising that Burma is the most militarized state in the entire region. Vietnam, on the other hand, perceives China as a credible threat, and much of its military posture is directed towards a possible attack from the north (Roy 2005). However, as Vietnam has no noteworthy internal insurgencies, the regime's control over the military remains strong. Other Southeast Asian nations have not confronted a

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realistic external threat since the 1960s. Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand may engage in certain threat scenarios for training purposes, but none of these countries believe that an external attack on their territory is imminent. Even Timor-Leste, which was released from Indonesian occupation only in 1999, does not view its giant neighbor as a significant threat. Accordingly, external threats have not been an important factor in prefiguring the extent of military intervention in contemporary Southeast Asian politics.

In addition to external threats, the civil–military relationship of a state can also be affected by international incentives or sanctions (Alagappa 2001: 52). The Turkish military, for example, has been sidelined from politics in the 2000s largely because the country seeks admission to the European Union, which requires its member states to meet strict democratic thresholds.[12] In Southeast Asia, in contrast, no such forces are at play. Since the late 1960s, ASEAN has enforced its principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of its member states (Weatherbee 2008). ASEAN's inability to push for meaningful reform in Burma has been testimony to this. Similarly, the US and Europe are also no longer seen as strong forces of military reform in the region. While Washington tried to force Indonesia to depoliticize its military in the late 1990s by imposing sanctions, it stopped pursuing this goal after September 11 (Mietzner 2002). From then on, counter-terrorism cooperation with Southeast Asian militaries became more important for the US than removing them from politics. Furthermore, the rise of China convinced the West that putting pressure on governments over military reform would only drive them into Beijing's arms. As a result, the West has largely ceased being a factor in Southeast Asian civil–military affairs. In Indonesia, military reform occurred despite, not because of, Western influence, and even in the Philippines – a US ally since the early 1900s – Washington has not left a significant mark on the shape of post-2001 civil–military relations. Thus, while domestic events obviously always take place in an international context, the latter has not been a prominent influence on military politics in Southeast Asia.

Internal military dynamics

Some scholars of civil–military relations have highlighted the linkage between the 'interests, power, and beliefs' of the armed forces and the extent to which generals intervene in politics (Alagappa 2001: 5; Aguero 1995). In their view, the particular ideologies or professional attitudes prevalent in a military matter greatly for the quality of civilian control. Hence, some of these authors argue that more professional militaries tend to accept civilian rule while those with politicized mindsets are likely to seek power for themselves. Others, however, have warned against positing the military as an agent of change in civil–military relations. For them, 'the military will *ceteris paribus* prefer more autonomy and decision-making authority *vis-à-vis* civilians' (Croissant *et al.* 2010: 13), regardless of the level of professionalism in the officer corps. There is much evidence in Southeast Asia to support this view. With the exception of Burma, most Southeast Asian states have implemented comprehensive professionalization programs in the 1990s and 2000s.

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Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, and – to a lesser extent – Indonesia have all spent significant amounts of money to upgrade their militaries and train their officers, yet the outcomes have been markedly different. The Thai military launched its coup in 2006 after 'what many Bangkok-based military attaches have characterized as the most far-reaching military reform and modernization program in Thailand's modern history.'[13] Ironically, the man who led this effort – Surayud Chulanont – accepted the position as the junta's prime minister in 2006. Likewise, the Philippine military increased its involvement in politics as it underwent a much-publicized modernization program.

In the Indonesian case, it would also be misleading to conclude that the military's marginalization from politics was a result of groundbreaking ideological changes within its ranks. While officers state in public that they now wholeheartedly accept civilian rule, in private they often still express their disdain for the alleged self-interest, incompetence, and lack of patriotism of the country's politicians. This is hardly surprising: in 2011, the leadership of the Indonesian armed forces was comprised of officers who graduated from the military academy in the late 1970s or early 1980s. This was the period in which the power of the military in the New Order regime was at its peak. Young, ambitious men entered the academy at that time not only in expectation of a military career, but also because senior political positions were all but guaranteed – both during active service and after retirement (Kammen and Chandra 1999). In the academy, this expectation was then underpinned with corresponding ideological and doctrinal teachings. It would thus be naïve to believe that the graduates from that era have now turned into firm supporters of civilian, democratic rule. The political ambitions of Indonesian officers have been constrained not by a newly discovered liberal conviction in the corps, but by the stable, democratic, and functioning polity since around 2004. This strong political system has denied the military the opportunity to follow the example of its Thai and Philippine counterparts, which exploited weak civilian polities in order to stage a comeback. Accordingly, with the exception of Burma, Southeast Asian civil–military relations after 2001 have been shaped by the successes and failures of civilian governments, not by ideational change within the armed forces.

Conclusion: Governance, leadership and civilian rule in Southeast Asia

This overview of developments in Southeast Asian civil–military relations after 2001 has pointed to a number of key patterns and trends. First of all, it highlighted significant change in three of the region's most important countries. Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia witnessed dramatic shifts in their civil–military relationships, but not in the way anticipated by the Alagappa volume in 2001. Thailand, for its part, drifted from relatively strong civilian government back into military-backed semi-authoritarianism, while the Philippines saw the achievements of the early post-Marcos period reversed by political chaos during the Estrada and Arroyo presidencies. Indonesia, however, which in 2001 seemed

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at the brink of institutional collapse and revived military dominance, surprisingly emerged as Southeast Asia's strongest democracy. Seen as one of the most uncertain candidates for stronger civilian rule in Alagappa's volume, it has overtaken its neighbors in a compelling fashion. Timor-Leste, which also had poor prospects of strong civilian control in 2001 (but had not been included in the Alagappa volume), became the only other state in Southeast Asia to be acknowledged by Freedom House as a democracy in 2010, despite periods of instability and widespread poverty. Vietnam, Singapore, and Burma, on the other hand, saw few changes in their civil–military dynamics since 2001. In fact, the junta in Naypyidaw now enjoys the title of the longest-serving incumbent military dictatorship in the world.

Obviously, Alagappa's prediction of a 'declining political role of the military' has not materialized in post-2001 Southeast Asia. The region has seen highly diverse outcomes, ranging from ongoing military rule (Burma) and reversals of democratic control (Thailand, Philippines) to stable civil–military relations in which the armed forces continue to be politically accommodated (Vietnam, Singapore). In this environment, Indonesia stands out as the exception to the rule rather than as a trendsetter. The reasons for this development have already been touched upon and will be discussed in detail in this volume. Most significantly, intensified political conflicts and domestic insurgencies in Thailand and the Philippines handed their respective militaries welcome opportunities of intervention. In Indonesia, by contrast, the levels of political tension declined substantially after 2001, stabilizing the polity and sidelining the armed forces from the decision-making process. The chapters in this volume find little evidence that historical legacies, economic factors, international influences, or internal military dynamics played a strong role in these developments. Instead, many of the trajectories outlined above can be traced back to policies and decisions made by top political leaders, for better or for worse. Thaksin, Estrada, and Arroyo destabilized the political systems of their countries through personal ambition and miscalculation, inviting the military back into the limelight. Yudhoyono, on the other hand, maintained political stability through calm (albeit sometimes uninspiring) leadership and a deeply ingrained instinct of conflict aversion.

The findings presented in this volume also have significant implications for the comparative debate on civil–military relations. For one, the material revealed in the various case studies demonstrates that developments *within* a civilian polity directly influence the degree of military involvement in politics. Most scholars of civil–military relations have focused on the details of the dynamics *between* the two sides as the determinant of their specific power balance (Croissant *et al.* 2010). This volume suggests, however, that the shape of civil–military relations is to a large extent forged by events that, prima facie, have very little to do with the armed forces. Conflicts between civilian groups, the erosion of democratic norms, and the ambition of rulers to keep their opponents at bay are often the main factors that pull the military into politics. Thailand, the Philippines, and pre-2002 Indonesia are key examples for this pattern. Conversely, stable systems of government in which all main civilian constituencies accept the rules of the game are mostly successful in

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excluding the armed forces from the political arena. Indonesia under Yudhoyono is such a case, but so are Singapore and Vietnam, which base their strong popular legitimacy on development and security rather than democratic elections. With the obvious exception of Burma, the aggressive pursuit of corporate military interests has not been the primary driver of military interference in Southeast Asian politics after 2001. Invariably, rising military influence began with and developed proportionally to self-destructive tendencies in the civilian polity.

Besides shifting the focus of attention from the military to the civilian side, this volume also warns against putting too much confidence in the explanatory powers of excessively structuralist models (Aguero 2001; Trinkunas 2005). For instance, theories that tie the extent of military involvement in politics to a country's level of development may be able to explain the difference between, say, Norway and Nigeria, but they fail to grasp the nuances of the much more complex Southeast Asian region. There, Thailand's per capita GDP is almost twice as high as Indonesia's, but the former saw a coup in 2006 while the latter successfully sidelined its military. Singapore's per capita GDP in 2009 was 36 times higher than that of Vietnam, yet both countries incorporated the military in comparable ways into their regimes and societies. Similarly, models which link the quality of civilian control to internal and external threat levels are only of limited value for Southeast Asian case studies. Indonesia, for example, faces no external threats but a host of internal threats. According to Desch (1999), this should lead to high levels of military autonomy from civilian control. Yet Indonesia has managed to limit the military's autonomy more successfully than many of its Southeast Asian neighbors. Finally, the volume also questions approaches inspired by 'historical institutionalism' (Croissant *et al.* 2010: 3). While history is of course highly important for the explanation of the various outcomes in the region, the Southeast Asian examples provide no compelling evidence for the power of path dependence. If historical path dependence were at play, Timor-Leste and Indonesia would probably be military-dominated autocracies today.

This volume, then, stresses the crucial role of civilian governance and leadership in maintaining the institutional stability that is required to keep the military out of politics. Civilian polities often become dysfunctional when their leaders try to bypass existing institutions and procedures in order to monopolize power. Thaksin's disregard for the 1997 constitution and its regulations was a case in point, as was Arroyo's manipulation of the 2004 elections. In contrast, one of the most prominent features of Yudhoyono's leadership has been his respect of Indonesia's parliament, the courts, and other agencies, even if they ruled against him. As a result, while Thailand's and the Philippines' institutional system deteriorated and gave the military opportunities of political engagement, Indonesia's polity strengthened and gradually removed the armed forces from the power center. To be sure, none of Southeast Asia's polities are strongly institutionalized (with the possible exception of Vietnam and Singapore), making them particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in the quality of leadership. Critics of Yudhoyono have pointed out, for example, that while he may have personally kept the military under control, he has not done enough to institutionalize effective systems of

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oversight. Similar criticisms have been made of Fidel Ramos, whose achievements fell apart the moment he left office in 1998. The future challenge for Southeast Asian leaders, therefore, lies not only in ensuring civilian control based on personal interventions, but in entrenching institutions that are strong enough even to withstand bad leadership.

Notes

1 This volume uses the term 'Burma' instead of 'Myanmar', the official name for the country chosen by the military regime.
2 See also Foreign Law Bureau, Office of the Council of State, 'Unofficial Translation: Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2550 (2007).'
3 '"Revolving Door" Policy Weakened Armed Forces,' *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 20 June 2010.
4 These data were calculated by the author, based on Kompas (2005) and Kompas (2010).
5 'Thai Military Bank in the Line of Fire,' *Asian Times*, 4 May 2007.
6 'Banks to Post B22bn Q4 Net Profit,' *Bangkok Post*, 13 January 2010.
7 For instance, the military is heavily involved in the lucrative private security business. I am indebted to Ukrist Pathmanand for pointing this out to me.
8 'Military-run Telecom Group Debuts,' *Viet Nam News*, 13 January 2010.
9 Interview with Juwono Sudarsono, former Indonesian defense minister, 19 May 2010.
10 'U.N. Slams Philippines for Failing to Stop Killings,' *Reuters*, 28 November 2007.
11 'Insular Attitude Will Not End the Southern Conflict,' *The Nation*, 3 November 2010.
12 'Breaking the Grip of Turkey's Military,' *Guardian*, 7 September 2010.
13 'The Search for a Suitable Man,' *Asia Times*, 28 September 2006.

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2 The armed forces of Burma

The constant sentinel

Susanne Prager Nyein

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When thousands of Buddhist monks took to the streets on 18 September 2007 to protest against Burma's military government, there was initially considerable international excitement about the biggest challenge to the military regime since the nationwide uprising in 1988. However, whatever hopes there may have been for regime change in Burma turned quickly into disillusionment. The world could literally watch the military machinery at work cracking down on the protests. The foreign minister of the military junta's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Nyan Win, declared two weeks later in the United Nations that 'normalcy' had returned in Burma.[1] It is not without irony that his word choice aptly describes what since 1962 has become 'normalcy' in one of the longest-lasting military regimes in history: violent suppression as an automatic response to any protest and political dissent.

In pursuit of its corporate and professional principles, the Burmese military, or *tatmadaw*, has firmly established its claim on being the sole protector, administrator, and builder of the nation for almost five decades, driving what in the words of Senior General Than Shwe is the 'eternally right policy for the nation' (Than Shwe 2005: 8). In doing so, it created a paradox in that it can 'safeguard' and 'build' the nation only by harassment and coercion of the populace. However, the military as government has successfully withstood Western pressure and sanctions by constantly enhancing its post-1988 political strategies and enlisting the support of Russia and China in the UN Security Council. Today, it is economically and diplomatically better embedded in the region than ever before and has prospects of easing relations with the West. After decades of direct rule, Burma's generals even felt confident enough to hold multi-party elections in November 2010 based on a new constitution that formally introduced a civilian-run political system.

This chapter examines the developments in Burma's military government and civil–military relations since 2001. It shows that the *tatmadaw* has consolidated its predominance mainly by subordinating all other constituencies to its corporate interests, leading to a further widening of the political, economic, and social gap between the ruling military elite and the citizenry. With officers and soldiers deeply penetrating into civilian areas of expertise and employment, the militarization of civilian space has intensified in ways that significantly exceeds the notion of 'new military professionalism.' As the military-run state has become

increasingly independent of the civilian arena, the power of the regime appears currently unassailable. Moreover, since the new constitution includes a built-in 'coup d'état clause' that allows the military to revert to direct rule whenever it deems necessary, the role of the military as constant sentinel is codified in the future political system.

In the following analysis, I will first give a short historical overview of the Burmese armed forces. The second section describes crucial developments and events since 2001 within the *tatmadaw* government as well as its overall involvement in the economy, security matters, and society. Subsequently, I seek to explicate the causes for Burma's asymmetrical civil–military relations and propose explanations for the decoupling of the military from the citizenry. The conclusion, finally, will look into the corporate identity and mission of the military, which are important to the understanding of the military's durability as the country's predominant institution.

The Burmese *tatmadaw*: a short history

The Burmese military has its roots in the struggle for independence, when young nationalists led by Aung San opted for an armed rebellion against the British colonial administration during World War II. Initially supported and trained by the Japanese, Aung San and his associates formed the Burmese Independence Army (BIA) in 1941. While the BIA was involved in the Japanese invasion of Burma in early 1942, it eventually turned against its sponsors, leading to a guerilla war against Tokyo's occupation in 1945. After the return of the British authorities, the Burmese troops were reorganized into the Burma Army under British control. Aung San, while offered a senior position in this army, shed his uniform to continue the independence struggle as president of the AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League), an umbrella organization of different nationalist groups and parties. However, he not only continued to control the Burmese soldiers, but also mobilized a huge number of armed 'volunteers'. As a result, he was able to maintain constant pressure on the British colonial administration, which finally granted Burma independence in 1948.[2]

The crossover between civilian and military roles during the independence struggle extended into post-colonial Burma, with most soldiers and officers affiliated to the AFPFL. Others were secretly attached to the Communist Party, which also had a mixed civilian–military leadership. Consequently, the activities of both military and political actors were intertwined with the brittle post-colonial situation. Confronted soon after independence with the outbreak of civil war between the government, communists, Karen National Union, and other opposition groups, the new democratic state could not settle into administrative normalcy. It became dependent on the army and armed volunteers to handle the crises, with civilians managing to establish at best subjective control over the *tatmadaw*. In the early 1950s, the external threat posed by Kuomintang troops intruding from China triggered the modernization and further strengthening of the *tatmadaw*, allowing it to expand its political and economic influence (Callahan 2003: 159–71).

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The political role of the military widened gradually, largely in line with the model developed by Samuel Finer (2002). According to Finer, politically ambitious militaries first pressure, then seek to displace, and finally aspire to supplant the entire civil political system. In Burma, a proto-coup took place during the civil war, when the chief of the army, General Ne Win, put pressure on the civilian government by declaring that the army was not prepared to play the 'watch dog for ministers'.[3] As a result, he maneuvered himself into multiple cabinet positions (deputy prime minister, home, and defense minister) between 1949 and 1951. In 1958, when the split of the ruling AFPFL party unsettled the political and army elite, Ne Win 'displaced' the U Nu administration by installing his 'caretaker government'. He temporarily returned power to a civilian government in 1960, but ultimately supplanted the entire political and economic system in March 1962 through a coup d'état.

Ne Win's Revolutionary Council quashed the opposition, dismantled civil society with the exception of religious associations, and expropriated private industries and businesses as part of a general nationalization policy. In 1974, the military dictatorship acquired a pseudo-civilian veneer by introducing a new constitution and establishing a Marxist-Leninist, one-party state. This 'new' polity was ruled by the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), which was largely made up of active and former military officers. However, unlike the one-party system in China, in which the army was clearly subordinated to the civilian party leadership, the BSPP was a civilian twin of the military, with Ne Win micromanaging both the army and the party.[4] The BSPP state was inward-looking and reform-resistant. Political protests or dissents were suppressed by force. Similarly, the regime led a constant counterinsurgency war against several ethnic groups and communists in the border areas.

After an economic meltdown and mass protests led to the collapse of the regime in 1988, a *tatmadaw* junta – called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) – took power. Sometimes misleadingly described as a coup (Callahan 2001: 425), SLORC's take-over simply continued Ne Win's military government without the civilian and socialist veneer. Like in previous decades, the military's strategy in the 1990s was guided by its corporate interest in securing its predominance. It manipulated and crippled the opposition, whose 1990 election victory was overturned. At the same time, however, it chose to reduce the counterinsurgency wars by arranging ceasefire agreements with armed ethnic groups. Concurrently, the regime opened up the economy, found ways to fund the expansion of the military, and effected Burma's integration into ASEAN and the wider region. In 1997, SLORC was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and the 2000s saw efforts by the junta to further consolidate its dominance while appeasing international criticism over its dismal human rights record. Accordingly, it initiated the drafting of a new constitution that institutionalized the supremacy of the military in a future, more 'civilianized' political system. For the regime, the elections held in November 2010 were a critical benchmark on the way to this new polity.

The junta's repressive rule has led to fundamental changes in the societal reputation of the Burmese armed forces. Initially, the image of the *tatmadaw* in

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society was positive. The army's anti-colonial resistance became legendary, and its soldiers were seen as the epitome of genuine, selfless patriotism.[5] At the end of the 1950s, the military-led 'caretaker government' was still relatively well perceived due to some popular economic and law enforcement measures.[6] Since 1962, however, the *tatmadaw* has largely resorted to repressive measures to establish its identity as Burma's über-nationalist institution with the eternal right to pursue its three main objectives: to prevent the disintegration of the Burmese Union, to unify the multi-ethnic nation, and to preserve the state's sovereignty. By doing so, the military has increasingly alienated the population it claims to protect. The following section analyzes in detail this gradual self-insulation of the Burmese military, which has gained particular speed since the early 2000s.

The military's consolidation after 2001

This segment discusses the post-2001 developments in Burmese civil–military relations from four different angles: the military as government; the economic activities of the armed forces; the *tatmadaw*'s involvement in national security and defense; and its role in society.

The SPDC and its path to the 2010 elections

In 2004, a major shift in the internal power structure of the 13-member SPDC junta contributed to the institutional stability of the military government. Prior to that, the unclear relationship between the three top generals – Senior General Than Shwe, Vice Senior General Maung Aye, and the chief of the Military Intelligence, General Khin Nyunt – had caused ongoing speculation about the balance of power within the SPDC leadership on the one hand and between the *tatmadaw* and the intelligence apparatus on the other (Seekins 2002: 202). In the first decade of SLORC/SPDC government, none of the three generals had emerged as supreme leader, because the former dictator Ne Win still wielded considerable influence over the *tatmadaw* and executive appointments. Ne Win's influence declined in the late 1990s, however, leading to increased efforts by Than Shwe and Khin Nyunt to outplay each other (Nyein 2010). This power struggle was finally settled in October 2004, when Khin Nyunt – along with officers loyal to him – was purged and his entire military intelligence apparatus dismantled.

Before his downfall, Khin Nyunt had established a supra-entity within the *tatmadaw* that caused constant tensions with the army.[7] He controlled not only all units dealing with military intelligence, national security, and international relations, but also assigned officers to foreign diplomatic posts and crafted the majority of SPDC policies. With so much power concentrated in his hands, Khin Nyunt had become a threat to the other members of the triumvirate.[8] According to an internal military account, Khin Nyunt's purge was triggered by his refusal to follow Senior General Than Shwe's order to relinquish control over the intelligence apparatus in exchange for his promotion in August 2003 to prime minister with the rank of full general (Shwe Mahn 2004: 29–30). In any case, the purge

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removed an important source of friction within the *tatmadaw* and strengthened the position of Than Shwe as SPDC chairman and commander-in-chief of the Defense Services.

While the composition of the upper echelon in the regime has remained largely unchanged since the purge of Khin Nyunt, there have been frequent reshuffles in the 33-member cabinet and the higher military administration. Reshuffles have evidently been a reliable tool employed by the top military leadership to maintain a steady circulation of personnel within the institution, thus preventing the formation of independent factions and power bases. These reshuffles, as well as the SPDC-centered, top-down command structure, have been instrumental in curbing the potentially centrifugal power of the regional commanders.[9] Under SPDC rule, almost all cabinet ministers have been active or retired military officers in the rank of colonel up to major general, with only the ministries of education, national planning, and health led by civilians. The principle of seniority and military ranking has been strictly adhered to – one particularly compelling example has been the makeup of the SPDC, with only members in the rank of major general and above serving on the council.

The judicial system under the SPDC government has been run by a department under the military-controlled home ministry. The new judiciary law of SPDC decreed in 2000, amended in 2003 and again 2007, has evidently not changed the subordination of the judiciary to the armed forces, but further consolidated it.[10] During its time, the SPDC has appointed all Supreme Court judges, who in turn appointed judges on lower court levels (state, division, district, and township) only with the explicit approval of the junta. The SPDC has been able to appoint and dismiss judges at its discretion as the judiciary law has not defined the length of their terms, nor has it provided any other regulations regarding the practice of appointment and removal (Burma Lawyer's Council 2004a: 16; 2004b: 89).

In the realm of institutional politics, the most important decision of the SPDC was the announcement in August 2003 of the 'Seven-Step Roadmap' to 'a genuine and disciplined democratic system' and the subsequent resumption of the National Convention.[11] Over one thousand largely handpicked delegates engaged in discussions at the National Convention, but lacked the power to alter any of the prescribed basic principles for the future constitution.[12] A final version of the constitution was submitted to popular vote on 10 May 2008, just a few days after Cyclone Nargis had killed over one hundred thousand people in Burma's Delta region. The government claimed later that the referendum had a 98 percent voter turnout, with 92 percent approving the new constitution.[13]

The multi-party elections held on 7 November 2010 formally marked the fifth step of the roadmap and determined the composition of the bicameral Union legislature as well as 14 state and regional legislatures. It remains to be seen how the convening of the legislative bodies (*pyithu hluttaws*) and the formation of the new government will impact on the long-term position of the military in Burma's political system. What *is* clear, however, is that in contrast to 1990 the military regime has managed to effectively control and manipulate the electoral outcome. In addition, it has included multiple protective features in the new constitution

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to ensure the perpetuation of its power in the new political system. According to the new constitution, the military as an institution is independent from any civilian control, and 25 percent of the seats and positions in legislative and executive bodies on all administrative levels are reserved for military personnel. The military is also in control of the ministries of defense, home and security, and border affairs. The presidency, officially the highest position in the new regime, was handed to Thein Sein, a former SPDC member. Moreover, though the SPDC was officially dissolved in March 2011, the constitution provides for an alternative executive body, the National Defense and Security Council (NDSC), led by the president and modeled after the SPDC.[14] In a state of emergency, the president (with the approval of the NDSC) can authorize one of the council's members, the commander-in-chief of the Defense Services, to take over state power.[15] In essence, this mechanism amounts to nothing less than a built-in 'coup d'état clause'. Therefore, it appears that the position of the military as a supra-authority and constant sentinel in the Burmese state has not fundamentally changed in the post-election environment. Rather, it has been constitutionally codified and legitimized by the electoral process.

The economic involvement of the military

After the collapse of BSPP rule in 1988, the command economy of the Ne Win era was officially discarded in favor of a market economy. However, it has been a market economy by name only, since the military regime has effectively monopolized economic affairs through its large complex of investments and interests. Through this economic engagement, the regime has controlled the formal sector and the country's vast natural resources, which in turn has allowed the military to practice extensive off-budget financing. During the so-called 'privatization' process, the military created a mesh of private and state-owned enterprises and conglomerates, both controlled by its elite. The conglomerates have generally been managed through one of the military-run ministries, or they have been owned and operated by *tatmadaw* officers, both active and retired. The largest conglomerates have been the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEHL), and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), which have been engaged in manufacturing, external trade, tourism, finance, banking, mining, gem trade, construction, real estate, and retail operations.[16]

Furthermore, the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), run by the ministry of energy, has regularly secured the biggest shares of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and revenue for the military government, with oil and gas making up 22 percent of the total FDI in 2007.[17] MOGE has signed numerous long-term cooperation deals with multi-national gas companies to explore onshore and offshore gas and oil fields, especially the large natural gas reserves in the Bay of Bengal off the Arakan coast and in the Mottoma offshore blocks in the Gulf of Martaban. In addition, MOGE has cooperated with Thailand in a huge hydropower project on the Salween River, and approved China's investment in the construction of a pipeline that was designed to deliver gas from Kyaukpyu to Yunnan province.[18]

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The monopolistic grip of the military over the economy has made positions in its upper echelon – from SPDC members to cabinet ministers and regional commanders – extremely profitable for their incumbents. Not surprisingly, the 'privatization' policy of the SPDC has engendered rampant corruption.[19] Licenses and concessions for the exploitation of natural resources, import and export deals, and government construction projects (including the construction of an international airport close to the new capital Naypyidaw), have been awarded to cronies and family members of the military elite. In a second wave of privatization, the military government made sure that prior to the elections in 2010 most valuable state assets and companies passed into the ownership of these very cronies and family members.[20] While this has generated many a tycoon and nouveau riche, their immense wealth has not automatically translated into an independent source of political power. Even though some cronies have taken part in the elections of 2010, they were candidates of the military-backed party and thus did not challenge the fundamental relationship to their patrons. The cronies resemble the 'pariah entrepreneurs' (Riggs 1966) of Thailand in the 1960s – they remain at the political fringes, obliged and bound to military patrons, and thus fully exposed to the fluctuations in their political fortunes.[21]

Much of this exponentially growing wealth in military circles has come at the expense of the fiscal health of the state. While expenditure for health and education respectively has been perpetually below 1 percent of the GDP, extraordinary amounts of money have gone into military-connected state enterprises and the *tatmadaw* itself (Turnell 2008: 6). In fact, SPDC has maintained an unlimited, open budget for military expenditure, which between 2001 and 2005 reached an average of US$ 6 billion per year, compared to US$ 1.99 billion in 1999 and US$ 1.02 billion in 2000 (Cordesman and Kleiber 2006: 9). Since tax revenues have usually not even covered half of the state's budget, the government has been selling bonds to the central bank – a mechanism that is equivalent to printing money in order to stay afloat. Between 1999 and 2006, the amount lent by the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) to the state increased almost eight times over, indicating that the CBM's role has been reduced to being a key fundraiser for the regime (Turnell 2006: 5; Turnell 2009: 314–15).

A striking example of the macroeconomic mismanagement of the SPDC regime was the dramatic increase in gasoline prices – eightfold in October 2005 and again fivefold in August 2007. Forced to counterbalance some of its escalating expenses, the regime ordered these increases despite warnings issued by the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce and Industry.[22] To a large extent, it was this decision that triggered the uprising of the monks in September 2007. A similarly compelling case of the regime's disastrous economic performance has been its manipulation of Burma's dual and diverging exchange rates. As economists have pointed out, Burma could actually balance the budget with its gas earnings. For this to occur, however, the regime would have to record the revenues based on the market exchange rate rather than on the official rate of the *kyat*, which is highly overvalued. Instead, the windfall from this currency manipulation has been effectively shifted into Burma's foreign reserve, from which the regime can easily

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draw funds for its projects (Turnell 2008: 6). Moreover, the regime has continued to misuse the *hundi* system, an informal, parallel remittance mechanism in which money is not transferred through banks but via a net of small money brokers in different countries. This system has allowed the regime to carry out international monetary transactions discreetly, circumventing international sanctions.[23]

National security and the regime's threat perception

In recent years, the military regime has expanded its armed forces from 198,000 in 1988 to an estimated 350,000–600,000 troops in the late 2000s (Maung Aung Myoe 2009: 200). At the same time, it has driven a process of military modernization, transforming an infantry-dominated, counterinsurgency-oriented army into a force presumably able to fight a conventional war. While internal security considerations have been the primary motivation for these changes, the growth of the army has also reflected the increasing external threat perception of the regime. The junta's fear of an external attack by the United States, described in official language as 'neocolonialist interference', had considerably increased in the wake of US-led sanctions, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and 'Western' demands for regime change. This apprehension *vis-à-vis* a possible attack from outside was conflated with SPDC's internal security concerns about potential alliances between the opposition, ethnic groups, and 'neocolonial forces'.[24] The SPDC considered three possibilities as to how the United States might attempt to overthrow their government: by instigating internal uprisings, cooperation with ethnic insurgents, or an invasion of a multi-national coalition (Blythe 2006).[25] While the visit of US Senator Jim Webb to Burma in August 2009 somewhat eased the tension between Burma and Washington, the regime remained highly suspicious of foreign 'conspiracies' to replace it.

Serious skirmishes between Thai and Burmese troops in early 2001 over border issues had already alarmed the SPDC about weaknesses in its actual defense capabilities, prompting the purchase of modern fighter jets and better air defense systems from Russia.[26] Subsequently, the move of Burma's capital from Rangoon to Naypyidaw in November 2005 constituted another step in the regime's gradual bolstering of its defense. Naypyidaw is located strategically in central Burma, replete with modern command stations and bunkers.[27] Far from large urban population centers such as Mandalay and Rangoon, the military administration obviously developed Naypyidaw as a secure command and control center in the event of civilian uprisings or cross-border invasions.

Initially, the expansion of Burma's army was not considered a threat to its neighbors and the stability of regional security because the *tatmadaw* was mainly equipped with defensive weapon systems (Selth 2002: 256). However, this perception has changed somewhat after the SPDC regime and North Korea entered into a military cooperation deal in November 2008. The prospect of increased collaboration between Burma and North Korea has raised nuclear proliferation concerns in the international community, arguably convincing the US administration in 2009 to rethink its position towards Burma and add the

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new element of engagement to its previous sanctions-only policy. Neighboring countries have also been alarmed by Burma's increased interest in procuring medium-range missiles and North Korea's involvement in building a tunnel-and-cave system in Naypyidaw, supposedly for the purpose of hiding missiles and aircraft.[28]

While the regime's external threat perception has significantly changed since the early 2000s, its internal security policy has seen only slight adjustments. Since the purge of Khin Nyunt and the breakup of his apparatus, the newly rebuilt military intelligence has been under the control of Senior General Than Shwe as minister of defense. The new intelligence agency has continued the tight surveillance of Burmese society, assisted by the USDA (Union Solidarity and Development Association), a government-sponsored mass organization, and *Swan Ah Shin*, a militia group. Significantly, the ethnic groups even witnessed a hardening of the regime's position, with the SPDC abandoning Khin Nyunt's accommodative approach and launching massive military offensives against non-ceasefire groups, especially the Karen National Union. Apparently, the SPDC applied these tactics in order to gain the upper hand in the ethnic areas before the 2010 election. The ceasefire groups, on the other hand, were asked in April 2009 to integrate their armed wings into the *tatmadaw* as Border Guard Forces (BGF).[29] Some have decided to engage the junta in order to defend their interests in the post-2010 political system, but key groups representing Buddhist Karen, Kachin, Wa, Mon, and Shan organizations refused to join the BGF. As a result, the SPDC cancelled the November 2010 polls in townships and village tracts controlled by these groups under the pretext of not being able to guarantee security. After the elections, armed clashes between armed ethnic groups and Burmese troops continued, pointing to the possibility of renewed civil war.[30] Thus, as the junta transitioned into a new political system, it appeared willing to sacrifice major elements of its national security and nation-building objectives to its determination to crush the ethnic opposition.

The tatmadaw *and society*

Although the regime have continued to tightly control Burmese society, a variety of civic organizations have sprung up in the course of post-Nargis disaster relief operations, bringing the number of officially registered non-governmental and community-based organizations in 2010 to 123.[31] Many of these developed because of the state's obvious inability to provide necessary services in public health, education, and disaster relief, but they have remained dependent on the state that closely monitors and tries to co-opt successful organizations. Although the sheer increase of civic organizations has been praised as evidence for the growth of civil society (Kivimäki and Pedersen 2008: 101), it should not be mistaken as part of a genuine democratization process since the state has maintained its heavy restrictions on independent political activity, thus preventing the emergence of any meaningful societal opposition (Hewison and Prager Nyein 2010).

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In its control of civil society, the regime has used government-sponsored mass organizations such as the Myanmar Fire Brigade, Myanmar Red Cross Society or the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation, which have usually been run by active and retired military officers. Since 1993, the largest government-sponsored organization and the civilian face of the military government had been the USDA, with approximately 23 million members. The USDA organized mass rallies in support of government policies, conducted military training, and undertook social and community services (Steinberg 2006: 46, 93) As mentioned above, it was also increasingly involved in policing civil society, cooperating with the militia *Swan Ah Shin* in the crackdown of the monk-led demonstrations in September 2007.[32] In March 2010, the regime predictably transformed the USDA into a political party (simply called USDP), developing it into its electoral vehicle for the November elections. Many high-ranking generals of the SPDC, with the exception of the top leaders Than Shwe and Maung Aye, shed their uniforms and ran as civilian candidates for USDP.[33] While other parties and individuals were constrained in their campaigns, the USDP had abundant funding and unrestricted access to the state media. Severe manipulations of the polls brought the USDP a win of 77 percent of the national vote. Consequently, representatives of the USDP and the 25 percent directly appointed military representatives have the controlling legislative power by occupying over 75 percent of the seats in almost all new legislatures.[34] In the national *pyithu hluttaw*, the Lower House, the USDP and the military hold a combined majority of 84 percent.

The regime's long-standing control over society has also been upheld through an effective system of media censorship and internet controls. While Burma has a diversity of magazines and journals (including online outlets), the government has demanded public opinion and press uniformity. Newspapers and TV channels have been either state-owned or military-aligned.[35] The privately owned *Myanmar Times*, for example, has been associated with various government figures since its establishment in 2000. In 2009, 0.22 percent of the Burmese population had internet access (ITU 2009), making the country one of the least 'connected' in the world, while its users have been among the most threatened. The two existing service providers have been controlled by the military, and users have faced long prison sentences for disseminating what the regime has called 'negativistic' news. The owners of the more than 100 cybercafés in Rangoon have been asked to register as 'Public Access Centers' as well as to take screenshots of user activities every five minutes and save them on CDs (OpenNet Initiative 2007, 2008). By using proxy servers, activists have tried to circumvent detection and transmit critical information and pictures to the outside world, such as during the uprising in September 2007. The SPDC, however, succeeded in temporarily shutting down the country's internet connection and terminating the majority of cell phone services during the crackdown.

The government's tense relationship with society has continued to be marked by an exceptionally bleak human rights record. The violations committed by the *tatmadaw* – especially in ethnic areas – as well as grave humanitarian conditions and abusive labor practices across the country brought Burma on the agenda of the UN Security Council in January 2007.[36] In the same year, the military government

violently quelled the demonstrations of students in August and the uprising led by monks in September; it raided monasteries, disrobed monks, and killed several protesters.[37] Over one thousand dissidents and members of the political opposition were arrested in the aftermath of the protests. Moreover, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been held under house arrest since 2003, was additionally convicted to a three-year prison term in August 2009 for hosting an American intruder in her house. Her prison term was changed into 18 months house arrest by Than Shwe, but her appeal to Burma's High Court was rejected. After she was banned from running in the 2010 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi ordered her party, the NLD (National League for Democracy), to boycott the polls. Convinced of its post-election dominance, however, the SPDC released her from house arrest just a few days after the polls. With her NLD officially defunct as a result of the boycott, Aung San Suu Kyi announced her intention to lead a 'non-violent revolution' and to cooperate with the new parties not affiliated with the USDP. It remains to be seen, however, how much political space she and these parties can claim, given renewed attempts of intimidation by the military. Individuals, artists, organizations, and media outlets that have been supportive of or connected with Aung San Suu Kyi after her release have immediately faced harassment and punitive actions.[38]

The above analysis illustrates that since the early 2000s, Burma's regime has consolidated its control by strengthening the military's central command structure and further marginalizing the opposition and civil society. Far from providing evidence for the junta's weakening, the elections in 2010 highlighted the fact that the military felt sufficiently confident about its position to proceed with its plan to transform direct military government into one with a civilian façade. Furthermore, the military elite's pervasive control over the country's natural resources and the informal economy has provided a constant funding stream for its projects and extravagant lifestyles. Significantly, international pressure and sanctions may have actually contributed to the *tatmadaw*'s consolidation by fueling fundamental security concerns that produced increased unity within the ranks. In the same vein, threats of international sanctions and invasion led the regime to expand the army and relocate to a new capital in 2005 – actions which have underscored the junta's self-perception as the only credible safeguard of the nation's sovereignty.

The ongoing military dominance: key factors

In this section, I analyze the main factors that help to explain the continued dominance of the *tatmadaw* over Burma's political system. I will first emphasize the army's marginalization of the citizenry and the consequent weakness of civilian political leaders, then focus on the military's corporate solidity, and finally discuss its continued sense of historic exceptionalism.

The marginalized citizenry

An important aspect in the continued hegemony of the armed forces has been the unbroken elitism in the upper echelon of the *tatmadaw* and its general disdain for

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civilians and politicians. In the 1950s, the military's involvement in administrative, political, and economic matters had already nourished the *tatmadaw*'s perception of its superior expertise and authority (Tin Maung Maung Than 2001: 163–4). However, it was only after 1962 that the Ne Win regime fostered the image of the *tatmadaw* as the vanguard of Burma's post-colonial social revolution. It claimed to undertake the historical task of building socialism in Burma that Aung San had envisioned and his civilian successors had betrayed.[39] In subsequent decades – and under different guises – the army prevented civilians from participating in political decision-making processes. Even the BSPP, sometimes described as the 'only nonmilitary contender for national power' in 1988 (Callahan 2001: 414), was in fact a *tatmadaw* offshoot. When the socialist state crumbled, it was the military's 'civilian twin' BSPP that took the blame and faded into insignificance. This was notwithstanding the fact that active military officers were members of the BSPP and Than Shwe even sat on its Central Executive Committee.[40]

The military's disrespect for civilians has been reflected in the highly coercive attitude of the regime towards any expression of public dissent. In her study on the subject, Callahan (2003) pointed out that the state's approach to internal crises in colonial and post-colonial Burma established a perpetual pattern of coercion in civil–military relations. Significantly, her description of the military's inability to 'distinguish between citizens and enemies of the state' (Callahan 2003: 3) was reconfirmed by the September 2007 uprising, when even unarmed and peacefully marching monks were perceived as state enemies.

While decades of military rule had already disempowered the citizenry, the SPDC apparently aimed to make it completely irrelevant. This trend has been observable in the lack of any political space, the control of even non-political civil society, and the ongoing harassment of dissenters. For instance, when the NLD offered in February 2006 to recognize the SPDC as *de facto* government if the junta in exchange convened the parliament elected in 1990, the SPDC viewed this proposal as impertinence and subsequently forced hundreds of NLD members to resign.[41] It is also curious to note that while the BSPP state referred to the citizenry as the 'working people', the term has now been replaced by 'basic class', which in Burmese literally translates as 'the class at the bottom' (*a kye khan luh than: sa:*) – a phrase that aptly describes the status of civilians in the eyes of the military.[42]

Some authors have suggested, however, that the military was not the only party to blame for the weakness of the civilians. Kyaw Yin Hlaing, for example, has argued that the role of civilians and civil society could have been strengthened had the opposition built up leadership capacity and mobilized the students instead of focusing on 'international attention' (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2005: 251). This assessment appears to be accurate for the 1990s, when the military was still somewhat weakened by internal divisions; but after its post-2004 consolidation, the regime has progressively monopolized the political and societal arena, leaving the opposition with no other alternative than to look to the UN and Western capitals for support. Even though it was eventually defeated, the uprising in 2007 indicated that a considerable number of civilians could be politically mobilized

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to stand up against an intransigent military state whose power rested solely on repressive force.

The growing gap between the military and the 'class at the bottom' has been mirrored in the regime's self-insulation from society. This has not only been exemplified by the new capital Naypyidaw, to which the SPDC withdrew in order to insulate itself from the population centers. Equally significant is the circumstance that the military has established well-funded and exclusive educational institutions for itself while the national university system has suffered from a chronic lack of funds.[43] Since the 1990s, the regime has enhanced its higher education schools to cultivate its academic offspring. For example, cadets have entered with full pay into the Defense Services Medical Academy, Defense Services Technological Academy, Technological College, and Defense Services Institute of Nursing and Paramedical Sciences to become – among others – engineers, medical doctors, male nurses, or pharmacologists.[44] Graduates of these institutes have become what I call 'hybrid professionals' in areas previously dominated by civilians, thus elevating the concept of 'new military professionalism' to an unprecedented level. Arguably, the establishment of this comprehensive system constituted another step for the military elite toward self-sustainability, increasing its independence from the civilian world surrounding it.

Corporate identity and institutional coherence

The protection of the army's corporate identity and interest is vital for the continuity of military dominance in Burma. Commentators have often speculated about rifts within the military, particularly in the SPDC leadership. However, the *tatmadaw* has largely succeeded in maintaining its long-term institutional coherence by subordinating everything to its organizational interests. Underpinned by the seniority principle and by patron–client ties, the military's authority-based, corporate culture has been habitually reinforced. Khin Nyunt's 'elimination' in 2004 was a compelling example of this. While he had contributed to the survival of the military regime in the early post-1988 period by initiating ceasefire agreements, establishing close ties with China, and engineering Burma's admission to ASEAN in 1997, Khin Nyunt's ambition and 'disobedience' (Shwe Mahn 2004) eventually undermined the overall stability of the junta. By removing him and his officers, therefore, the SPDC consciously forfeited the 'brain' of the regime and the intellectual capital of his intelligence corps. In this sense, the purge was a corollary of the patron–client system, in which preference is given to loyalty rather than to expertise and skills.[45]

The tensions prevalent in the 1990s between the central military leadership and powerful regional commanders also seem to have declined. In retrospect, the fidgetiness in the military leadership in the 1990s was most likely related to an unclear command structure and the absence of a clear succession plan. As described above, the most senior 'patron' of the *tatmadaw*, Ne Win, still had powerful protégés in leading SPDC positions, such as Tin U and Khin Nyunt. From the late 1990s onwards, however, Than Shwe was slowly filling cabinet positions,

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regional commands, and the SPDC with his loyal officers. In the late 2000s, the central command hierarchy was largely consolidated, with the intermediate layer of five SPDC generals as chiefs of Special Operations Bureaus controlling the metropolitan area of Rangoon and the regional commands. And while the greater institutional complexity of the post-2010 system could potentially create tensions between the new institutions and the old SPDC figures, these conflicts are unlikely to undermine the power structure built around Than Shwe. Even though the SPDC has been formally dissolved, the new political system has presented a replica: the NDSC, which perpetuates the executive power of the SPDC regime. Nevertheless, the power circles around Than Shwe will undoubtedly put much effort into controlling possible rifts between former high-ranking military officers in the USDP and younger, newly appointed active officers. These tensions could especially pertain to economic turfs and established patronage systems, with younger and upcoming military officers vying for their share of the spoils.

While the continued solidity of the military elite has been one of its major assets throughout the 2000s, the blatant lack of discipline in the lower ranks has emerged as a worry for the regime. The massive expansion of the army since 1988 has been partially responsible for this (Selth 2002: 254–5). Forced conscription, child soldiers, and maltreatment of troops have been widespread phenomena, leading to a high number of desertions. In 2006, 9,497 soldiers deserted in a four-month period, while in the same period 13,764 new recruits were conscripted.[46] In contrast to the officer corps, soldiers have often been as impoverished as the majority of the population. The notorious picture of a soldier in flip-flop sandals shooting the Japanese journalist Kenji Nagai in the September 2007 uprising did not indicate accidental 'sloppiness', but pointed to the structural poverty of the lower ranks. As a result of their poverty, soldiers have frequently sold equipment, including their boots.[47] However, a coup d'état of the non-commissioned officers or a revolt of lower ranks – a common phenomenon in other military-dominated states – is unlikely to occur in Burma. Arguably, the widely accepted supremacy of the officer corps and personalized power structures in the junta will be able to prevent this. While the possibility of an intra-military rebellion cannot be completely ruled out, it would need a serious regime crisis – similar to the one in 1988 – and the emergence of strong, alternative leadership for any such scenario to materialize.

The historic mission of the tatmadaw

One of the military's main strengths has been the missionary zeal derived from its sense of 'historic exceptionalism'. As mentioned above, protection and building of the nation are – for the *tatmadaw* – two intrinsically connected tasks that only the military can accomplish. Thus, the military has the right not only to be involved in all security matters, but also to determine the 'eternally right policy for the nation' (Than Shwe 2005: 8). Based on this institutional narrative, the *tatmadaw* feels called upon to intervene in times of 'national crisis' and to rebuild the nation. Within this framework of the military's sense of entitlement and mission, however, there is much room for ideological adjustments. While Ne Win promulgated

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the implementation of a socialist system as his historic duty, the SLORC/SPDC government shook off the socialist legacy in line with the changed, post-cold war situation. Addressing this shift, Than Shwe explained in 2007 that the historic mission at that time was the reform of the economy and one-party system into a 'free market economy' and 'multi-party system'. Therefore, 'our *Tatmadaw* Government cannot be simply seen as caretaker government to maintain law and order but … a transitional government of historical necessity which is undertaking a state transformation' (Than Shwe 2007: 8).

Beyond the obvious propaganda, the military leadership seems to have recognized that economic development is critical to the *tatmadaw*'s interest and its security concerns. As stated by Than Shwe (2005: 8), the 'economy is the crucial fulcrum balancing politics and military, since only wealthy and technologically developed nations can become a military power.' In the view of the Burmese junta, Vietnam and China have provided models of rapid development without changing their authoritarian power structures. In this regard, the crucial reform phase initiated by Deng Xiaoping has been of particular interest to the SPDC.[48] Officially, Burma has recorded double-digit annual GDP growth rates between 1999 and 2010 – figures that were in line with China's and above Vietnam's. While international monetary institutions believe that real growth has been much lower and reached only 4.4 percent in 2009 (Asian Development Bank 2010; IMF 2009), it is clear that some economic growth did take place, bolstering the regime's belief in its political and economic indispensability.

Given the military's understanding of its historic mission and the political realities after the elections, it is evident that Than Shwe's reference to the *tatmadaw*'s role as a 'transitional' government was not meant as an indication of its willingness to hand over power to civilians once that 'transition' is completed. Instead, the '*coup d'état* clause' in Chapter XI of the new constitution was designed to allow the armed forces to revert to direct rule whenever they deem necessary, and it thus puts Burma constitutionally on an indefinite loop of military rule (Prager Nyein 2009: 647).[49] Than Shwe said as much in an address to National Defense College graduates, when he stated that 'The leaders in the military have to take leadership roles in the future politics of the nation, and prevent the infringement of our three principles, defend them, and proactively clean things up from within the *hluttaws* [parliaments] and administration … and to make this an exemplary era of glorious history' (Than Shwe 2005: 8). The construction of Naypyidaw (and its decoration with giant statues of Burmese warrior kings) epitomized this historic mission and vision of the *tatmadaw*. Often interpreted as a symbol of the military's harking back to Burma's pre-colonial past, it is in fact more accurately described as a declaration of the 'glorious role' that it intends to play far into the distant future.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that the military consolidated its dominance over Burmese politics since the early 2000s. From an institutional perspective, the purge of Khin Nyunt in 2004 stabilized the command structure and strengthened

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the centralized government of the SPDC. By giving primacy to institutional coherence and loyalty, Khin Nyunt's quick marginalization prevented what Stepan (1988) described as decomposition of the coercive apparatus, which can sometimes open up political space for civilians and lead to changes in overall power relations. In addition, the monopolized control over Burma's natural resources and the economy has provided a constant funding stream for the *tatmadaw* regime to sustain its dominance, despite disastrous macro-economic policies and international sanctions. Moreover, civilians who profit from the military economic system have been unable to develop independent political power, as they remain dependent on military patrons who seem to slowly morph into oligarchs. Other civilian groups have been systematically and increasingly harassed, leaving no space for any political or civil society. But while the regime's attempts to co-opt civil society and transform the citizenry into a compliant 'basic class' intensified after the turn of the century, they have been emblematic of a deeply ingrained pattern of coercion in Burma's civil–military relations. This pattern has been nurtured by the *tatmadaw*'s sense of superiority and conviction of its historic mission, which in turn has contributed to the constantly widening gulf between the military elite and civilian populace. The extent of the manipulations in favor of the USDP in the 2010 elections has further confirmed this pattern, the emergence of new opposition parties notwithstanding.

While the ongoing consolidation and role expansion of the *tatmadaw* has undermined the prospect for more symmetric civil–military relations in Burma, the military has paradoxically created limits to its own aspirations. On the one hand, the army's decision to more than double in size over the last two decades has contributed to its overall consolidation. As it expanded rapidly, however, it has faced unprecedented levels of desertion, indicating a deteriorating morale among lower ranks and thus ultimately weakening the combat readiness of the fighting force. Moreover, the military's infiltration of highly specialized, civilian professions could accentuate the tensions between the army's core tasks and distinctly non-military assignments, possibly undermining the coherence of the *tatmadaw*. In the same vein, conflicts between active military officers and the ex-military USDP elite over political and economic influence in the post-2010 polity could challenge the very unity and corporate identity of the armed forces. After all, the high-ranking ex-officers who became civilian politicians in the new legislative bodies have added a curious dimension to Burma's civil–military relations. While still locked in the mind-set of belonging to the army elite and not to the much-loathed class of civilian politicians, they actually lost the power and clout that comes with wearing a *tatmadaw* uniform. Although it is rather unlikely that they will challenge the power structure that benefited them and their families, it remains to be seen how their relationship with the *tatmadaw* will evolve as their distance to the new and upcoming officer corps continues to grow.

Despite these uncertainties, the inherent dynamics of civil–military relations and military governance in Burma indicate that the *tatmadaw* is neither willing to withdraw from politics nor prepared to accept a subordinate position in the

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political system that emerged from the 2010 elections. The transformation of direct military rule into a more modern system of electoral authoritarianism reflects the *tatmadaw*'s confidence in its power and the institutional arrangements it has put in place.[50] The new constitution, enacted before the elections in 2010, codifies the military as an oversight institution independent of civilian control, with its coercive apparatus intact, and in full charge of defense, home and security, and border matters. Presumably, the elections and the subsequent political transformation have released some pressure from Burma's society by allowing a controlled engagement of civilians in politics, but it has not compromised the *tatmadaw*'s supreme power position. Thus it seems that, for an indeterminate future, Burma's military will play the role of a constant sentinel always ready to intervene and revert to direct rule whenever it deems necessary.

Notes

1 The minister of foreign affairs also declared that outside interference had caused the protests. See http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=24116&Cr=myanmar&Cr1=&Kw1=general+assembly&Kw2=&Kw3
2 On the role of Aung San in the Burmese independence struggle, see Prager (1998).
3 For details about Ne Win's maneuver, see U Nu (1975: 182).
4 According to Tin Maung Maung Than (2001: 165), the BSPP even followed the command hierarchy of the military.
5 Aung San contributed to its legendary image. He referred to the army and its soldiers as being honorable, just, and patriotic (Prager 1998: 176–80).
6 For a personal and detailed perspective by one of the responsible officers of the 'caretaker government', see Maung Maung (2001).
7 According to Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2005: 232–8), the intelligence officers often pursued their power and business activities on regional levels, thus colliding with local army officers.
8 Khin Nyunt reportedly intended to expand his power base further by planning to build up a battalion to get his own troop support. Interview with Bo Bo Kyaw Nyein, political analyst, November 2007.
9 Interview with a former officer of the *tatmadaw*, November 2007.
10 According to the Judiciary Law No.5/2000, justice is supposed to be administered independently. However, Amnesty International (2005) has documented the ongoing misuse of the legal system, especially in political cases.
11 *The New Light of Myanmar*, 31 August 2003. The National Convention had been suspended in 1996.
12 Throughout the entire process, a committee of high-ranking military officers, and the Supreme Judge, supervised the National Convention. The delegates comprised representatives of ethnic ceasefire groups, but no representatives of the major political opposition party, NLD, were invited. For documentation of the National Convention, see http://mission.itu.ch/MISSIONS/Myanmar/n-convention/n-convenindex.htm
13 *Asean Affairs*, 30 May 2008. http://aseanaffairs.com
14 The National Defense and Security Council consists of 11 members: the president, two vice presidents, two speakers of the Union legislature, the commander-in-chief and his deputy, the ministers of the portfolio for defense, foreign affairs, home affairs, and border affairs (Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2008, Chapter [V] 201).
15 See National Convention (2007), Chapter [I] 28, [XI] 1–5, 8–11; and the Constitution of

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the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008), Chapter [I], [XI] 410–14, 417–420 (in Burmese).

16 The defense ministry owns 40 percent of the shares of UMEHL, and retired and active officers hold 60 percent. Normally, all foreign investors have to enter into joint ventures with UMEHL (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 392, 413; and Altsean 2003: 84).

17 *The Myanmar Times*, 22(428), 2008, Special Feature Energy.

18 *Mizzima*, 27 March, 30 October, and 9 November 2009.

19 In 2009, Myanmar ranked third last – followed only by Afghanistan and Somalia – on the worldwide Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International 2010).

20 *The Irrawaddy Online*, 30 September 2010.

21 For example, after the purge of Khin Nyunt, many of his cronies and 'licensees' – including his son – were convicted for corruption, or they lost their concessions. See Lintner (2005).

22 Information given anonymously by a member of the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce and Industry to a German journalist. See *Der Spiegel* online international, 24 October 2007.

23 The *hundi* system has been highly important, extending up to the highest levels of the military administration. Interview Bo Bo Kyaw Nyein, November 2007.

24 The influence of foreigners has been described by Than Shwe as 'indirect enslavement under neo-colonialism. Hence, the Tatmadaw must ensure perpetuation of sovereignty at the risk of lives' (Than Shwe 2006).

25 Information based on a document of the ministry of defense of 2005 (Blythe 2006).

26 With the help of Russian experts, the military has tried to deploy a new radar and air defense battalion at the Thailand–Burma border in Tenasserim. See Blythe (2006) and *Irrawaddy Online*, 1 July 2007.

27 Interview with a former military officer, October 2007.

28 *The Bangkok Post*, 29 June 2009.

29 *The Irrawaddy Online*, 4 May 2009.

30 *Mizzima*, special coverage of ethnic conflict, http://www.mizzima.com/towards-elections/security-threats/bgf-developments.html

31 Official webpage of *NGOs in the Golden Land of Myanmar*, http://www.ngoinmyanmar.org

32 UN Special Rapporteur Paolo Pinheiro (2007) mentioned both organizations explicitly as being involved in the crackdown.

33 For a detailed chronology of the history of the USDA and its transformation into USDP, see *Mizzima*, http://www.mizzima.com/political-pro/military/usdausdp.html

34 *Mizzima,* special coverage of the election 2010 (http://www.mizzima.com/election2010.html); for detailed graphical tables and statistics of the election outcome, see Horsey (2010: 5).

35 Many Burmese have been listening to international broadcasters, however, despite the illegality of such actions.

36 Recurrent military offensives against insurgent groups in eastern Burma have created up to 500,000 internally displaced people (IDMC 2010).

37 The military arrested 3,000–4,000 people. In late 2007, up to 1,000 persons were still in 'informal detention centers', 74 were missing (Pinheiro 2007).

38 Artists supportive of Aung San Suu Kyi were banned from performing, newspapers that covered her release in special editions could not publish for two weeks, and the patients and personnel of an HIV center have been evicted after a visit by Aung San Suu Kyi. See *Mizzima*, 3 December 2010.

39 The image of the revolutionary military was based on the idea that the *tatmadaw* had to complete the revolution left unfinished by Aung San when he died (Prager 1998: 361–5).

40 Interview with former (BSPP) trade minister, former Colonel Khin Maung Gyi, by Myat Khaing (2007: 27).

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41 Press Statement of the NLD, 12 February 2006, *The Financial Times*, 14 February 2006. The SPDC allegedly ordered the USDA in April 2006 to 'eliminate the activities of the opposition; destroy the opposition's business … create splits among opposition family members … and frighten and intimidate the most stubborn members'. See *Asia Times Online*, 5 May 2007.
42 *Weekly Eleven News*, 4 March 2010; *Myanmar Times*, 24(469), 2010.
43 The military training schools are described in Tin Maung Maung Than (2001: 170–2).
44 See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mofa.gov.mm/speeches/2Intake_DSMA.html, http://www.mofa.gov.mm/speeches/7th_defence_SG_Speech_24dec04.html; *The New Light of Myanmar*, 1 January 2005.
45 Ne Win often used a well-known Burmese expression: *Lu gaung nhe lu taw dwe yin lu gaung ko yway ya meh* ('If you have to choose between a good or a smart guy you have to choose the good guy'). I am grateful to Tun Kyaw Nyein for pointing out the usage of this expression.
46 According to Blythe (2007), the regiments 'are fined when they fail to meet quotas.' On child soldiers in Burma, see Heppner and Becker (2002).
47 Interview with a former Burmese soldier of the 44th infantry battalion, who deserted and subsequently moved to the US, December 2008.
48 The military leadership reportedly ordered books and documents on Deng Xiaoping. See *Irrawaddy Online*, Intelligence Report, September 2007.
49 The '*coup d'état* clause' first allows the president to take over executive power after seeking the approval of the NDSC. In a second step, when the 'disintegration of the Union is imminent', the president (after coordinating with the NDSC) transfers legislative, executive, and judicial powers to the commander-in-chief of the Defense Services to restore 'normalcy', which means that the military takes over power (Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2008, Chapter [XI], Articles 410–32; National Convention 2007, Chapter [I], Article 28, [XI], Articles 1–23).
50 For a discussion of the concept of 'electoral authoritarianism', see Schedler (2006).

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3 Thaksin, the military, and Thailand's protracted political crisis

Pavin Chachavalpongpun

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On the evening of 19 September 2006, a coffee shop in suburban Bangkok was unusually busy for what should have been a quiet Tuesday night. Throughout the day, rumours had been ripe about an imminent military coup that would satisfy the demands made by the anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) during many months of noisy street protests. With tensions rising, regular clients rushed to the coffee shop to receive and exchange the latest information on the political situation. Soon, a cheering and joyful sound erupted among the shop's customers. The expected military coup had indeed occurred, and elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had been ousted. It was the 18th military coup since Thailand had abolished absolute monarchy and adopted a democratic system in 1932. The leader of the coup, General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, quickly appeared on state television and explained the reasons for the action. Behind him, the portraits of the King and Queen of Thailand seemed to indicate royal approval for the military's actions. Earlier, tanks had rolled on the streets of the Thai capital, and some Bangkokians had been seen offering flowers and food to soldiers. Evidently, they were excited about the coup – a rather peculiar scene in a country that is also known as the 'Land of the Free' (Basche 1971) and which had been widely praised for its seemingly successful democratization since the last coup in the early 1990s.

The coup not only destroyed the image of Thailand as a consolidating democracy; it also powerfully demonstrated the continued dominance of the Thai military in politics despite many decades of attempts to sideline it. Apparently, previous predictions of an overall decline of the political power and influence of the Thai military and its participation in governance had been overly optimistic (Alagappa 2001: 16).[1] To be sure, there had initially been signs that Thaksin's assumption of power in 2001 would pave the way for a return of strong civilian control over the military. Thaksin became the first prime minister to have completed a full four-year term in office, winning landslide elections in 2001 and 2005. Thailand's political landscape seemed to have shifted toward a more democratic political system, led by Thaksin and his overpowering Thai Rak Thai Party (Thais Love Thais). But Thaksin, in this very same process, gradually reinvented himself as the embodiment of the Thai state (Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker 2004: 101–3). While Thaksin gained

overwhelming support from his voters in rural areas through the implementation of populist policies, he increasingly tilted his administration toward authoritarianism. Corruption was rampant (Thornton and Thornton 2008: 36). Thaksin's political adversaries, organized in the loose PAD alliance and with the backing of the oppositional Democrat Party, launched widespread demonstrations that demanded Thaksin step down. Amidst increasing chaos on the streets, the military eventually decided to end the political mayhem with a coup. At first glance, the overthrow of the Thaksin regime may symbolize a mere symptom of a fragile civil–military relationship. But the protracted political crisis, which had begun before the coup and persists until today, raises more intriguing questions about the reasons for the continued role of the armed forces in Thai society, and particularly its resurgence after 2006.

This chapter, therefore, seeks to untie two major conundrums while explicating both the political chaos after 2006 and the breakdown of civilian control. First, it analyses the key factors behind the military's return to politics, which occurred despite the fact that the domestic environment, under Thaksin's rule, was largely democratized. Second, the chapter shows that the concept of nation-building underwent a serious redefinition, with Thaksin introducing the 'politics of representation' as the new identity of the Thai state. This shift, however, posed a grave challenge to the traditional power-holding institutions, with significant repercussions for civil–military relations.

Embedded in these themes and questions is the chapter's main argument. My analysis demonstrates that Thaksin, in consolidating his civilian rule and trying to erase the prospect of a coup d'état, sought to politicize and control the military. Most importantly, Thaksin intruded into the army's internal affairs by promoting his loyalists, two of whom were his own relatives, to key military posts (McCargo and Ukrist 2005: 147). This politicization of the military and Thaksin's nurturing of cronyism undermined the professionalism and neutrality among Thai soldiers. The attempt to reposition the military into Thaksin's own sphere of influence, or – as this study terms it – the 'Thaksinization of the military', effectively diluted its corporateness and factionalized this institution along political fault lines. More critically, the Thaksinization of the military seriously disturbed the traditional power network inside the army dominated by General Prem Tinsulanonda, the former prime minister and then President of the Privy Council. This circle is part of what McCargo calls the 'network monarchy' (McCargo 2005: 499) – a larger set of power connections centered on King Bhumibol Adulyadej.[2] The study further argues that this network has for long interfered in the political process in order to safeguard the military's power position in politics. Prem's intimate relationship with the palace and the King's interest in preserving his own role in the political domain underscore the reasons why Thaksin's domination of state power and his politicization of the army were perceived by the traditional elite as a threat to both the marginalized generals and the monarchy. Hence, the coup of 2006 was staged not only to defend the professionalism of the military, but also to decimate Thaksin's civilian rule that had threatened the traditional power network.

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In developing its arguments, the chapter first revisits briefly the history of military involvement in politics prior to the arrival of Thaksin. Subsequently, it discusses Thaksin's politicization of the military, the increasing factionalism in the armed forces, and the competition between the royal power apparatus and Thaksin's own network. Finally, the chapter reviews the current civil–military relationship in the post-Thaksin era and the causes of the persistent political crisis, ranging from the poor quality of civilian governance to the military's desperation to maintain its traditional power network amidst rising anti-military attitudes.

The military's trail in politics: a brief history

Among its Southeast Asian counterparts, the Thai military has always been rather unique because of the fact that Thailand was never officially colonized by foreign powers. This lack of colonial experience has marked the political identity of the armed forces in two main ways. First, unlike Indonesian generals, Thai officers could not claim credit for having freed their home country from colonial oppression (Vibulpong Poonprasit 1981: 45). Since the military was not born out of a nationalist movement, it did not enjoy the same support from the people as armies in countries where the armed forces were able to rally public support in their fight for independence. Trying to compensate for this absence of nationalist credentials drawn from a heroic independence struggle, the Thai army tried to play a particularly strong role in nation-building and the institutional development of the state. Most significantly, its 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy entrenched the military's perception of itself as the guardian of the nation and its 'democratic' values. Second, the inability to confront an external enemy (i.e., a colonial suppressor) led the Thai army to focus largely on domestic enemies, claiming to protect the state and, at the same time, cementing its power network in politics. But identifying internal enemies was a rather arbitrary and superficial exercise, with the military picking its enemies according to the constantly changing concept of nation-building (Pavin Chachavalpongpun 2005: 58–65). Throughout the Cold War, Thai communists, together with their comrades in Indochina, were presented as the main danger to the country.[3] Subsequently, however, drug trafficking was portrayed as the most important threat to national security, alongside the protracted conflict in the Thai south where the Muslim minority has long been considered the 'otherness' *vis-à-vis* the Thai Buddhist state. Most recently, the military leadership portrayed Thaksin as the latest threat, not only to the Thai nation, but also to the centuries-old royal institution.[4]

In the process of dealing with its selected enemies, the military periodically staged a coup when it felt that a threat was imminent and challenged its traditional power position in politics. Proclaiming itself as Thailand's moral compass, the military subsequently influenced public opinion to accept the inevitability of the coup it had launched. More often than not, it legitimized the coup as the only way to save democracy, cleanse the dirt in Thai politics, get rid of corrupt politicians, and restore stability. In many instances, the military even claimed that the King endorsed its coup (Chalermkiet Phiu-nual 1986: 139). Although some of these

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characterizations of Thai politics were accurate, the military was far from being the country's moral compass because its periodic political interventions were blatantly self-interested and delayed democratization. However, the military also sought other means of legitimacy to maintain its share of the state power monopoly, such as through development projects. These projects had begun during the counterinsurgency campaign against the communists. The military believed that communist ideology had to be countered with its specific version of 'democracy', and the war had to be fought not just militarily but also through economic and political development (Ockey 2001: 196). The military's development efforts led to close cooperation with the bureaucracy in this period, as well as with the palace. The King himself initiated a myriad of developmental projects designed to raise the people's living standards in remote regions. The military became an important instrument of royal projects that covered agriculture, fishery, land and road development, irrigation, education, and rainmaking. For example, the King's crop substitution project in 1969, initiated to replace opium plantation among hill-tribe communities with cash crops, was actively promoted by the military since opium production and consumption was perceived as a threat to national security.

While the military's primary focus was internal opposition and dissent, there were also external threats that assigned a quintessential role to the military in determining national security and defense policies. First and foremost, the Cold War reinforced ties between Thailand and the United States. For example, Washington offered generous financial and military aid to Bangkok to support its containment of communist groups. In return, Thailand cultivated a distinctly anti-communist reputation to justify the American grant aid (Fineman 1997: 97). This mutually beneficial cooperation allowed the United States to promote an anti-communist Thai state that openly condoned the rise of militarism.[5] Such external conditions further entrenched the military's influence in the state's decision-making process. The military, exploiting the Cold War pretext, also took control of foreign policy-making. It redefined the concept of national security, picturing Thailand as being surrounded by a host of unfriendly neighbors and pro-Soviet forces. In the view of the military, this image provided it with legitimacy to monopolize foreign relations.

Thus, from the post-1932 era through the Cold War, the military was the dominant political force in Thailand. The military's posture was far from being static, however; it kept reinventing itself in response to the changing political order. As prime minister during the 1980s, General Prem embarked upon constructing his own patronage network based on his connections with senior civil servants, business groups, political parties, and powerful newspapers, presenting the military as a forceful instrument to protect the interests of his clients. However, when former general Chatichai Choonhavan became the first elected member of parliament to be chosen as prime minister in 1988, he tried to end the direct involvement of the military in politics. For the first time, the military's power network was under threat. Not only did Chatichai take over the defense portfolio, but his policy of turning the battlefields in Indochina into 'marketplaces' for Thailand also reduced the level of the military's influence on foreign policy (Sunai

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Phasuk 1997: 76). The perturbed relations between Chatichai and the military, among other reasons, led to a coup in 1991.

Former diplomat Anand Panyarachun, a respected royalist, was initially selected by the coup-makers as the interim prime minister, but when one of the coup leaders, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, decided to take up the premiership himself, street protests erupted. What followed were the bloody events of May 1992, or 'Black May'.[6] With the massacre of protestors disgracing the military in the eyes of Thai society, the military was subsequently forced to go into 'hibernation' throughout the 1990s.

The re-politicization of the military

Thaksin Shinawatra arrived in power in 2001 with a sophisticated yet daunting plan: to co-opt the military, not to challenge it. The military may have taken a low-profile stance throughout the 1990s, but it had not really withdrawn from politics. In fact, Prem's patronage network had operated quietly alongside civilian governments, with a large number of retired army commanders being invited to join party politics. This convenient arrangement had allowed the military to retain indirect control over the levers of government and, at the same time, placate the rising societal demands for civilian democratic governance. For the political parties, it had deflected the possibility of being forced out of office by coups, a recurrent feature of Thai politics in the 1970s (Ganesan 2004: 26–7). It was this inexorable relationship between the military and the civilian political order in the pre-Thai Rak Thai period that encouraged Thaksin to flirt with the idea of converting the military into his own direct source of political support. The Thaksinization of Thailand, therefore, began with the re-politicization of the military.

But instead of working with the existing power network in the military, Thaksin built a new network of his own. Thaksin's strategy to ensure loyalty from certain factions in the military was reflected in the composition of his Thai Rak Thai Party. His team was replete with ex-military strongmen, including former Prime Minister General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth (as minister of defense),[7] General Thakmarak Isarangkura na Ayudhya (as deputy minister of defense), General Pallop Pinmanee, General Rattana Chalermsanyakorn, Admiral Suravuth Maharom, Air Chief Marshal Sermyuth Boonsiriya, former Army Commander-in-Chief General Chetta Thanajaro, and former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defense General Yuthasak Sasiprapha (as deputy minister of defense) (McCargo and Ukrist 2005: 134). In hindsight, it appears ironic that it was Thaksin who set the scene for the renaissance of military prominence in public life. In his government, military men did not have to stay in the closet to play politics, but were able to openly flaunt their relationships with civilian leaders. The bitter period of the military's isolation following the Black May of 1992 had officially come to an end.

Under Thaksin, the first wave of the military's re-politicization occurred in August 2001 during the annual military reshuffle. Significantly, Thaksin promoted his cousin Lieutenant General Uthai Shinawatra, the deputy director of the

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defense ministry's Planning and Policy Office, to the rank of general, and moved him up to become the director of the same office. He also promoted another cousin, Lieutenant General Chaisit Shinawatra, special advisor to the army, to serve as deputy commander of the Armed Forces Development Headquarters. Within two years, Chaisit, who had little experience in top army posts, was elevated to become army commander. Thaksin's promotion of his own relatives and other loyal military officers, without any consideration of seniority or merit and without resistance from the minister of defense, signaled the normalization of nepotism in the military (Abhisit Veijajiva 2007: 57–63). Now that he had installed his own cousins in top positions, Thaksin – a former police lieutenant colonel who had studied at the Armed Forces Preparatory Academy – proceeded to promote members of his graduation class (Class 10). Members of Class 10 themselves were eager to be politicized in order to improve their promotion prospects. In less than 12 months, Thaksin had placed 35 of his classmates in key posts in the military. James Ockey noted that once promoted to positions of power, these relatives and close friends could not only provide support to Thaksin but also arrange further promotions for his classmates (Ockey 2007: 110). In essence, Thaksin's maneuvers intensely shifted the power constellation within the military, aggravating personal rivalries and giving rise to extraordinarily sharp factionalism.

To a certain degree, Thaksin's approach to the military was not dissimilar to what happened under previous administrations. Like some of his predecessors, he promoted personal favorites over the heads of more qualified candidates while ignoring all criticism.[8] The difference, however, was that Thaksin's plot to politicize the military was done on a large scale and in a very systematic manner. In setting up his own power base within the army, Thaksin openly challenged the military's traditional power network. Installing his own friends and relatives in key positions was crucial if Thaksin wanted to bring the military into line with his government's domestic and foreign policies. Indeed, these pro-Thaksin factions were willing to defend the prime minister's policies while pretending to remain apolitical. For example, Thaksin-handpicked Army Chief Somdhat Attanand stated in 2002 that 'it is time for the army to follow the government's policies'.[9] Nonetheless, Thaksin's strategy was not only based on rewarding individual generals. He also applied specific tactics to secure the military's political support as an institution. These tactics included the increase of the military budget, albeit slightly, and his positive response to the military's requests for arms purchases.[10] In October 2002, Thaksin, accompanied by a team of military officers, visited Moscow and held discussions with Russian leaders on the development of Thailand's military capability (Buszynski 2006: 276–96).[11] Thaksin believed that this new approach toward his loyalist factions in the military, through rapid promotions and corporate incentives, would allow him to establish a firm foothold in the armed forces. In the meantime, he increasingly controlled the military's decision-making process, its budget, and its defense policy. 'Network Thaksin' was inescapably heading toward a frontal collision with the traditional power-holders inside the armed forces.

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A battle of two networks

In constituting pro-Thaksin factions inside the military, the prime minister disturbed the army's internal balance of power, politicizing and factionalizing it to consolidate his own 'civilian' supremacy over the generals. Most importantly, the Thaksinization of the military had a great impact on the power base of the traditional elite in the military. As mentioned earlier, the source of political stability since the 1980s had been a power network established by then Prime Minister Prem. Prem's biographer William Warren rightly noted that while he 'has played a central role in Thai life for many years, he remains a somewhat enigmatic figure to many, different not only from most other soldiers but also from politicians'.[12] A well respected military officer, Prem established a reputation of being a 'moral' leader trusted by the palace. As a non-party figure, he claimed to remain politically neutral during his time as prime minister. This carefully constructed image was meant to convey the message that Prem was a leader protecting national interests, rather than those of politicians or his own. Along the way, however, this 'moral' leader gradually built his own empire of power. Prem forged personal ties with a number of large conglomerates, such as Bangkok Bank, the largest commercial bank in Thailand, and the Chareon Pokphand Group (CP), one of the largest agribusiness, retailing, and telecommunications companies in Asia (Handley 2006: 376; Chai-Anan Samudavanija 1997: 56).[13] Prem also commanded the loyalty of senior bureaucrats, and he worked closely with political parties, including the Democrat Party, to strengthen his rule. This support by political parties was designed to compensate for Prem's obvious lack of democratic credentials. In return, Prem's network ensured that the power of these supporting actors – mostly party leaders – would be protected. In short, Prem's network emerged as a club for the rich and powerful, suggesting that the prevalent practice of nepotism significantly predated the Thaksin era.

Prem's status in Thai politics was further heightened as he resigned from the premiership in 1988 and was appointed a privy councillor,[14] making him one of the King's closest confidants. While the importance of Prem's appointment was unrecognized at the time, it fundamentally reorganized Thailand's political order. His power network, developed during his days in the army and as prime minister, evolved into the inner core of the 'network monarchy', effectively fortifying the royal–military alliance in the face of weak civilian governments. Yet intimate relations between the palace and the military were not a new phenomenon. The military had for long claimed as its main responsibility the safeguarding of one of the ultimate symbols of the Thai nation – the monarchy. During the reign of absolute monarchs, the Siamese kings needed the military to support their reforms and to quell dissidents. In the post-1932 era, the military needed the monarchy to validate its mission in politics. As Handley and McCargo reiterated, it is vital to understand King Bhumibol as a political actor and the primary architect of a lifelong project to transform an unpopular and marginalized monarchical institution – on the verge of abolition more than once – into the single most powerful component of the modern Thai state (Handley 2006: 9; McCargo 2007: 137). The

King's project demanded the military's unfailing support; in return, he justified and consolidated the military's presence in politics.

This mutual dependency inherent in the monarchy–military alliance has been the predominant factor shaping Thai politics, with often negative repercussions for democracy. The 2006 coup against the Thaksin government and Thailand's deep political polarization are best explained in this context.

The network monarchy has been a valuable tool for the King to reconcile involvement in politics with popular expectations towards the royal institution as a highly revered and non-political symbol. Network monarchy, therefore, has allowed the palace to tacitly but effectively intervene in politics, especially in times of crisis, as seen in 1992 and – most recently – in 2006.[15] Prem has been known to act on behalf of the palace to restore political equilibrium, even when the real issue at hand was the protection of royal power and that of the military. More often than not, Prem has exercised his authority by getting involved in the appointment of cabinet members and the promotions of senior bureaucrats. But the main goal of the network monarchy has been the continued glorification of the royal institution, as well as the reinvigoration of the King's political role. Similarly, Prem's network has aimed to defend the monarchy's ultimate moral authority above elected politicians – an authority guarded by the military. In order to achieve these goals, Prem has frequently launched his own personal campaigns to further sanctify the power of the King. In an interview with the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in 2006, less than 24 hours before the military staged its coup against Thaksin, Prem said:

> In this country, we consider that we belong to the king. The armed forces [belong to the king]. That is what we take oath [on] and have to profess – that we have to belong to the king. So that makes it easier to understand ... Do you know horse racing? In horse racing they have the stable and the owner of the stable owns the horse. The jockey comes and rides the horse during the race, but the jockey does not own the horse. It is very easy [to comprehend]. A good government can make a good jockey [with] ethics and moral standards ... My country is about 800 years old, and we run the country as a kingdom. We will never be a republic or be without the king. So that is the trick – the only thing that induces the people together. So, as long as we have the king, 'this very, very good King' we have right now, we will go ahead either slowly or rapidly, but we will be united.[16]

His statement drew a clear demarcation line between the network monarchy and the military as the defenders of the nation on the one side and Thai politicians, more specifically Thaksin, on the other. It also pointed to the iron rule of Thai politics in the pre-Thaksin period: the monarchy and the military reserved the right to intervene and restore 'order' whenever new social or political forces threatened their dominance over the state, society, and the economy. Beyond day-to-day politics, this constellation reflected larger societal trends. Wealthy entrepreneurs and royalists in Bangkok defended – and continue to defend – their interests by blocking the emerging Thai middle class from exerting greater socio-political and economic influence. This middle class had grown since the 1980s, but gained

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much more importance after Thaksin's rise to power. Perceiving the rising power of the middle class as a threat, and deeply suspicious of Thaksin's populist policies, the network monarchy ultimately decided to reinforce the boundaries between the 'good' forces (i.e. the King and the army) and the 'bad' (i.e. disrespectful politicians).

The power boundaries disturbed

As emphasized above, the re-politicization of the military at the hands of Thaksin was designed to bring some army factions, if not all, under his personalized 'civilian' control. In other words, to prevent the military's intervention in politics, Thaksin was determined to intervene in the military. By doing so, however, he disturbed the boundaries of the old network jealously safeguarded by Prem. Thaksin's promotion of relatives and classmates to key military posts, his manipulative use of budget allocations, and the monopolization of defense policy: all these actions were designed to dislodge Prem's dominant network and replace it with one of his own devising. Thaksin largely succeeded in this effort, and Prem's influence in the military was consequently declining. For example, Thaksin refused to consult with Prem in regard to important promotions inside the armed forces. But while Prem was Thaksin's main target, he was not the only one who felt marginalized by the prime minister. The palace and the Bangkok elite also shared the resentment caused by Thaksin's arrogance of power (Lynch 2006: 85; Pavin Chachavalpongpun 2008a). In September 2001, Thaksin upped his game by transferring General Surayud Chulanont, the army chief, to the ceremonial post of supreme commander. This transfer signaled Thaksin's scheme to further deracinate Prem's power in the military. Surayud, who enjoyed close ties with Prem and was endorsed by the palace,[17] had been known to favor structural reform of the military, demanding more professionalism in the army. But, as it turned out, Surayud's 'demotion' was just the first step in Thaksin's long campaign to shrink the old power network.

Subsequently, Thaksin sought to gain control over Thailand's foreign policy, sidelining the military and advancing his own business-oriented approach. With the exception of the Chatichai period, the armed forces had successfully insisted on a Cold War-centric foreign policy that stressed the need to maintain a buffer zone between pro-Western Thailand and the more neutral Burma. At the same time, the military supported ethnic insurgents who lived within that buffer zone and fought against the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Burma's ruling junta. But Thaksin, who owned a variety of businesses in Rangoon including the lucrative telecommunication project named IPStar, abolished the buffer zone and crushed the ethnic insurgents in order to appease the junta (Pavin Chachavalpongpun 2008b: 216–7). The Thai army, especially the troops stationed in the north, disapproved of Thaksin's cosy relations with Rangoon. It accused Burma of using its army to create a security crisis along the border as a bargaining chip for Thai accommodation.[18] Surayud, in particular, disagreed with Thaksin's new pro-Burma policy, partly because he felt sympathetic toward some of the ethnic minorities along the border.[19] However, Surayud's view was ignored by

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Thaksin, whose self-confident approach to Burma reduced the position of the military in external affairs and thus weakened its overall political strength.

Similarly, Thaksin tried to establish control over the Muslim south, an area that for decades had been managed more or less effectively through military counterinsurgency measures. In May 2002, Thaksin dismantled the institutional centerpiece of this approach – the Southern Border Provinces Administration Center (SBPAC) – and handed the security management of the territory to the police (Harish and Liow 2007: 167). But as his policies began to backfire and the level of violence rose, Thaksin increasingly adopted hardline measures against Muslim militants that required the military's backing. In fact, while Thaksin was widely blamed for the deteriorating situation in the south, the military's brutality also contributed to the continued violence. The Krue Sae Mosque incident on 28 April 2004, for example, saw extrajudicial executions of Islamic radicals by the military. On that day, 32 militants had sought shelter in the 425-year old Krue Sae Mosque in Pattani after carrying out attacks on several police posts. In a full-blown assault on the mosque, the army killed all insurgents. On 25 October 2004, the Tak Bai incident in Narathiwat province witnessed another highly publicized tragedy when hundreds of local Muslims who protested against the detention of some of their associates were also arrested. With their hands tied behind their backs, they were later thrown by soldiers onto trucks to be taken to an army camp. After a five-hour journey, 78 detainees were found to have suffocated to death.[20] Eventually, the Muslim south became another battlefield of the contest between the Thaksin regime and the traditional networks in the military, with the growing chaos in the territory aggravating Thailand's political crisis as a whole.

Factors triggering the military's return

The increase of the military's involvement in Thai politics since 2006 – as evidenced by the coup and the installation of the current military-friendly government under Abhisit Vejjajiva in 2008 – was triggered by several developments, most of them related to the character of Thaksin's rule. First and foremost, the Thaksinization of the military undermined the professionalism of the army, angering officers who felt that they were disadvantaged by the prime minister's blatant nepotism in making key appointments. Similarly, the erosion of meritocracy in the military challenged both traditional elites in the armed forces and, in particular, Prem's royalist network. As a result, important factions in the military aligned with anti-Thaksin forces to overthrow him, strengthening the institutional role of the armed forces as a result. The following sections will review some of the key reasons for the resurgence of military power after 2006.

Factionalization and royal politics

The first factor driving the military's sudden re-entry into the political arena in 2006 was Thaksin's strategy of fragmenting the institutional unity of the military. He created a rift within the armed forces, promoting those outside Prem's power

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network while alienating those inside it. Believing that his election victories and his complete control of the parliament made him strong enough to 'colonize' the military, he began to place his relatives, friends, and loyalists in key military posts. This factionalization engineered by Thaksin split the army between those who perceived themselves as truly 'professional' (i.e. as rejecting cooptation by the government) and those who allegedly were not. But the notion of professionalism is of course a highly subjective category. Prem probably accused those who defected to Thaksin's camp of being 'unprofessional' simply because they had made a choice different from his own. Yet Prem himself had long driven the militarization of politics. Prem not only controlled networks that were deeply involved in politics, but also took advantage of weak civilian governments to shore up his own power interests and those of the groups he represented. However, while supporters of Thaksin and Prem in the military were politicized in similar ways, Thaksin's rule offered more prospects for democratic reforms than Prem's did in his time. To his credit, Thaksin opened up the political space for free electoral contests and new social forces, albeit with unconcealed ambitions of establishing himself as Thailand's unchallenged leader.

The second factor in the re-politicization of the Thai armed forces was Thaksin's desire to gain complete authority over the military's internal affairs. Aside from Thaksin's control of military promotions, he also acquired a firm grip on the military budget and national security policies. By doing so, he turned the military into the government's mouthpiece and his own political instrument. For example, the army-controlled radio stations were exploited to promote Thaksin's political agendas, such as his One *Tambon* One Product (OTOP) project, a stimulus program designed to support the locally made and marketed products of each Thai *tambon* (sub-district). The military, traditionally celebrated as the guardian of national interests, was suddenly reduced to being an advertiser of the government's merchandize. In addition, the armed forces saw their role in regional security diminished. Thaksin's transformation of long-standing Southeast Asian enemies into trading partners, although seemingly serving Thailand's interest, effectively stripped the military of its influence on external relations. Against this background, there was a strong sense of loss of traditional military roles and expertise within the officer corps, leading to the determination to regain them through political intervention. The Thai case thus seems to confirm Samuel Finer's notion that militaries tend to intervene in politics partly in an effort to maintain or regain their traditional fields of expertise (Finer 1975: 22).

Third, and most essentially, Thaksin's move to challenge the alliance between the monarchy and the military triggered a backlash by both of these key institutions, culminating in the coup. Previously, the longevity and strength of Prem's network had been guaranteed by its glorification of the monarchy, which was portrayed as the inviolable icon of the Thai nation. Therefore, Thaksin's hegemonization of political power threatened not only the military, but also the position of the monarchy. The military and royalist groups have often called those who imperil the status of the monarchy *phu mai hwang dee*, or 'people with ill intentions', and Thaksin was now firmly established in this category. When Thaksin – at

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the height of the street protests against his government in 2006 – stated that 'Only if the King whispers in my ear, I would happily step down from the premiership', his statement was construed by his royalist opponents as a defiant act against the King. Subsequently, the coup-makers charged that the Thaksin regime was bordering on *lèse-majesté*, and that the dignity of the King had been undermined. The message was clear: the coup was staged in defense of the crown, removing the disrespectful prime minister and his controversial government (McCargo 2006). Behind the masquerade of defending a popular King, however, there were deeper-laying fears among the military and the royalists: first, they suspected that Thaksin was trying to replace network monarchy and its iconic figurehead with more modern, but much less predictable notions – democracy and populism. Second, they simply feared that the diminishing power of the monarchy would diminish their own power. The coup ended Thaksin's successful attack on the royalist and military elites, restoring the pre-2001 power balance between the social, economic, and political forces associated with the King. Yet it became clear very quickly that this post-coup constellation was unlikely to remain unchallenged in the longer term.

The current crisis and concluding observations

Thaksin may have gone, but his proxies have continued to challenge the presence of the military in politics. Initially, the bloodless coup, which yielded considerable support from the Thai public, was seen as a decisive victory of the network monarchy over Thaksin and his allies. It now seems, however, that Thaksin's fall has moved Thailand into even more uncertain territory. Thaksin's re-politicization of the military confirmed a fundamental reality in Thai politics: once the military has been dragged into the political arena, it will do everything it can to stay there. But Thaksin's meddling with the military was not without its advantages. Most importantly, it unveiled the ugly side of Thai politics, marked by the manipulations of wealthy and powerful elites in Bangkok. Similarly, the Thaksinization of the army brought with it a wider debate on the role and position of the military, especially its incongruity with democracy. After Thaksin opened up the once closed political space and increased people's political consciousness about the military's domination of politics, the network monarchy faced its most difficult political battle in decades. The anti-military United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), endorsed by Thaksin, has repeatedly proclaimed itself as the defender of democracy. Wearing red outfits to distinguish themselves from the yellow-clad royalists, the UDD members have pledged to fight for the elimination of the military's influence in politics. In what has turned out to be a huge dilemma for the military, these groups are not merely pro-Thaksin, but also genuinely pro-democracy. This has made their suppression much more difficult to justify.

After the coup of September 2006, the military picked General Surayud Chulanont to lead the interim government (October 2006–January 2008). It rewrote the constitution in a way that would constrain the role of future prime ministers and their elected governments. But the popularity of Thaksin has

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remained high, especially in the northern and northeastern regions of Thailand. As a result, Samak Sundaravej, a self-proclaimed Thaksin proxy, was able to win the post-coup election in 2007. However, Samak's premiership did not last long (January–September 2008); he was forced to resign over a bizarre case in which his appearance in a televised culinary program while serving as prime minister was construed as a conflict of interest. Samak's opponents in the judiciary impeached him, and he was subsequently replaced by Thaksin's brother-in-law Somchai Wongsawat (September–December 2008). Perceived as another threat to the old networks, Somchai, too, was ordered by the Constitutional Court to step down because some executive members of his People's Power Party (PPP), the reincarnation of the Thai Rak Thai Party, were charged with electoral fraud. The Court eventually disbanded the PPP in December 2008 and barred Somchai and all of its executive members from politics for five years.

In order to strengthen its old networks, the military helped to install the civilian government of Abhisit Vejjajiva in December 2008. Abhisit's Democrat Party gained the upper hand in parliament after Newin Chidchob, a one-time Thaksin ally, defected from the defunct PPP and convinced the 37 members of parliament under his control to throw their support behind Abhisit as prime minister. Not surprisingly, Thaksin's political allies and the red-shirt protesters were enraged by the new power arrangement that they strongly believed was stage-managed by the armed forces.[21] They also believed that Abhisit, the leader of the Democrat Party, had been used by the military as its agent to outmaneuver them and Thaksin, whom the generals still viewed as the biggest threat to national security. But the members of the urban and rural working class that had risen during the Thaksin years – in alliance with another set of conglomerates – no longer interpret politics in the way that the military sees fit. Taking advantage of the increased democratic atmosphere, they have registered their presence in politics and continued to confront Prem and his networks as obstacles to democracy and further social transformation. In fact, the campaign to remove Prem escalated in 2009 and 2010. The red-shirt protesters demanded that Prem resign from the Privy Council and admit that he was behind the 2006 coup. When their demands were not met, they stormed into the venue of the ASEAN Summit in Pattaya and staged riots in Bangkok in April 2009. Thus, despite their return to power in 2006, the positions of Prem, the military, and the monarchy were far from being secure.

In the aftermath of the Pattaya and Bangkok incidents, the military and the elite in Bangkok initially succeeded in demonizing Thaksin and his red-shirt supporters, describing them as a threat to national security and to the country's reputation abroad. Put under political pressure and faced with prosecution for their violent demonstrations, the red-shirt leaders remained silent throughout the rest of 2009, suggesting to the military that their movement was becoming incoherent and disorganized. But in March 2010, the red-shirts returned, and this time with an even greater vengeance. The trigger for the red-shirts' revival was another move by the new regime against Thaksin. On 27 February 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that Thaksin had abused his power for personal gain while serving as prime minister and would be stripped of US$ 1.4 billion of his frozen US$ 2.3 billion fortune.[22]

The confiscation of a significant part of Thaksin's assets was predictable, since allegations of his corruption had served to justify the military coup of 2006. But Thaksin's supporters in the red-shirt camp not only viewed the verdict as a plot to further delegitimize Thaksin, they also believed that the case highlighted the existence of social injustice and double standards in Thai society. Motivated by the allegedly politicized court verdict, the UDD launched its first demonstration since April 2009; this time, it demanded that the Abhisit government dissolve parliament and immediately call for fresh elections.

The government's rejection of this demand led to a major confrontation between the state's security forces and the red-shirted UDD in April 2010. The demonstrators, gathering near Phan Fah Bridge in Bangkok's administrative quarter, clashed with government troops. Twenty-four people died in this incident, including one Japanese journalist and five soldiers. In response to the violence, the UDD moved away from the Phan Fah Bridge and consolidated in the city's upscale shopping area at the Ratchaprasong intersection. This was an effective strategy, one that reportedly had been developed by rogue army officer Major General Khattiya Sawasdipol. Khattiya's defection to the Thaksin camp and his determination to fight against the military until it withdrew from politics pointed to the continued fragmentation of Thailand's armed forces and the increasing polarization of society as a whole. More importantly, Khattiya became something of an idol for low-ranking soldiers originating from Thaksin's stronghold in the poor, remote villages in the north and northeast of Thailand. These soldiers were sympathetic towards the red-shirts and understood their grievances, with some of their parents even participating in red-shirt demonstrations. The Thai media therefore began to call them 'watermelon soldiers' – green on the outside, but red within.

Khattiya's assassination by a sniper on 13 May 2010 at the Ratchaprasong intersection took the conflict to a new level.[23] A fresh round of deadly clashes between the red-shirts and the state's security forces ensued, culminating in the violent closure of the Ratchaprasong camp on 19 May 2010. Armored vehicles led the assault on the final bastion of the red-shirts, leading to television images that the rest of the world usually associated with war-time Beirut rather than with metropolitan Bangkok. Allegedly, some of the radical elements within the red-shirt movement reacted to the attack by setting fire to the Central World building, situated in the heart of the upscale shopping area and home to one of the largest shopping malls in Southeast Asia. The death toll quickly rose to almost 100, and more than 2,000 people were injured. Meanwhile, core UDD leaders were arrested and detained at various prisons across the country. The arson attack against Central World provided a welcome pretext for the government and the military to justify their iron-fisted approach to the red-shirts, and it allowed state officials to accuse some of the radical members of the UDD of being terrorists. Subsequently, the red-shirt movement suffered greatly from its negative, government-imposed image, especially in the eyes of Bangkok residents. At the same time, however, those protesters who were forced to return home took with them a sense of even deeper anger and disappointment. They believed that they were once again treated unfairly by a state that used violence against them but kept an unelected government in power.

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While Prime Minister Abhisit's position was strengthened by the outcome of the crackdown, he realized that he urgently needed to counter the widespread impression that his government was a puppet of the military. Abhisit thus began to put his own men in high positions in the military – the exact same tactic once employed by Thaksin. For example, he appointed General Prayuth Chan-ocha as the new army chief, replacing the lacklustre General Anupong, who was to retire at the end of September 2010. The news of this appointment infuriated the red-shirted UDD because Prayuth was believed to have played a key role in the fatal crackdowns. Moreover, Prayuth has gained a reputation of being a staunch anti-Thaksin figure, suggesting that he might take an even tougher line if red-shirted protesters were to take to the streets again in the future. According to one report, Prayuth previously served as commander of Thailand's 21st Infantry Regiment, which is specifically tasked to protect the Queen and is perceived as being especially conservative in its political outlook.[24] Hence, the appointment of Prayuth seemed to have been designed to reunite the military and strengthen Thailand's anti-Thaksin establishment in the period leading up to the end of King Bhumibol's reign. To the red-shirts, the appointment signaled first and foremost that the military and the Bangkok elites are determined to hold on to power. Paul Chambers even argued that Prayuth might not hesitate to stage yet another coup to support the interests of the anti-Thaksin forces.[25]

This ongoing competition between military-backed royalists and the Thaksin camp highlights the persistence of a vicious cycle in Thailand's political conflicts. In this cycle, the struggle for democracy leads to increasing political violence, which in turn is used by the military to justify its coercive and political role in restoring order. With periods of democratic opening invariably followed by increased levels of intra-civilian infighting and subsequent military intervention, there seems little prospect of fundamental change in the foreseeable future. Indeed, given how essential the royalist forces have been to the architecture of political conflict in Thailand, the uncertainty over King Bhumibol's succession is set to add another layer to the already complex relationship between the key socio-political forces. Whatever political constellation may emerge from this uncertainty, the military – it appears – is likely to play a major role in it.

Notes

1 However, Alagappa also argued that the military was far from giving up its institutional and professional autonomy, its influence in security policymaking, its developmental role, or its business interests.

2 Explaining that Thai politics are best understood in terms of political networks, Duncan McCargo has introduced the concept of network monarchy. According to McCargo, 'network monarchy' was the leading political network of the 1973–2001 period and involved active interventions in politics by the Thai King and his proxies, notably former Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda. Thaksin sought to displace network monarchy with new networks of his own devising.

3 For many Thai generals, communism in Thailand was an import from Indochina. General Saiyud Kerdphol, former supreme commander, once said that 'The [communist] insurgency has no real root in this country and is essentially an external creation, then

it seems to us that the use of military force to destroy guerrilla bands on the basis of sound intelligence is both appropriate and legitimate. We believe that Thai villagers are basically loyal' (Saiyud Kerdphol 1986: 39).

4 Royalists who control state institutions have often used the draconian *lèse-majesté* law against their opponents. They claim that this law was designed to protect the well-being of the monarchy, which is also a matter of 'national security'.

5 Accordingly, cooperative mechanisms were initiated to cement US support for Thailand and to reconfirm Thailand's acceptance of American hegemony. Such mechanisms included the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), founded in 1954 to block further communist gains in Southeast Asia.

6 'Black May' refers to the popular protest in Bangkok in May 1992 against the government of General Suchinda Kraprayoon, and the bloody military crackdown that followed. Up to 200,000 people protested in central Bangkok at the height of the protests. The military crackdown resulted in 52 officially confirmed deaths, many disappearances, hundreds of injuries, and over 3,500 arrests.

7 The choice of Chavalit as defense minister was seen by political observers as an expression of Thaksin's gratitude, or *boon khun*. Chavalit, as prime minister in 1997, had made Thaksin a deputy prime minister, albeit for only three months. Moreover, Chavalit had agreed to merge his New Aspiration Party (NAP) with the Thai Rak Thai Party; this enabled Thaksin to form an even stronger government.

8 'Priewpan's Tears Take Nepotism to New Levels', *The Nation*, 11 August 2009.

9 'Chavalit Breaks Ranks: PM "Giving in' to Rangoon"', *The Nation*, 13 August 2002.

10 Between 2001 and 2006, the military budget increased from Bt. 75.4 billion (US$ 2.5 billion) to Bt. 85.9 billion (US$ 2.9 billion). According to Ockey, however, the budget stagnated, and actually declined as a percentage of GDP. After five years of Thaksin, the military was still 15 percent below the budget levels of 1996, and more than a third lower in constant US dollar prices (Ockey 2007: 112).

11 *Phim Thai*, 12 October 2002. Quoted in McCargo and Ukrist (2005: 151).

12 This statement appears on the back cover of Warren's Prem biography (Warren 1997).

13 Paul Handley elaborated that Prem's intimate relations with these conglomerates were in fact born out of the King's desire to co-opt the kingdom's wealthiest families into his own power clique. Later, Prem was invited to join the CP Group's executive board. The same approach was also used with the Bangkok Bank (Handley 2006: 376).

14 The Thai King appoints a Privy Council of advisors. Privy councillors can, under royal command, represent the King at official functions. Other important functions include drafting amendments to the Palace Law regarding the procedures of royal succession. The president of the Privy Council acts as regent *pro tempore* in the King's absence. King Bhumibol's Privy Council as of 2009 is composed mostly of retired military leaders and members of the royal family. Prem is the current president of the Privy Council.

15 The footage of General Suchinda Kraprayoon, general-turned-prime minister and one of the coup-makers in 1991, and Major General Chamlong Srimuang, leader of the anti-military demonstrators, receiving an audience in front of the King in May 1992, is one of the most memorable political events in Thai history. The King demanded their reconciliation so as to bring peace to Thai politics.

16 'General Prem Tinsulanonda', *Far East Economic Review*, 19 September 2006, available online at http://www.feer.com/articles1/2006/0609/free/prem.html

17 This explains his appointment as prime minister to lead the post-coup government in 2006.

18 Email interview with Bertil Lintner, 12 October 2007.

19 Surayud's father, General Phayom Chulanont, was one of the leaders of the Thai Communist Party. While on the run from Thai authorities and working underground as the chief of staff of the People's Liberation Army of Thailand, he spent a number of years with the ethnic minorities along the Thai–Burma border. This could explain why Surayud was sympathetic toward them.

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20 For further discussion, see Croissant (2005).
21 'Poll Point to Public Backing for Abhisit', *The Nation*, 12 January 2009. Also see Nonoy Oplas, 'Killing in Thailand during the Military Crackdown', 16 April 2009, available online at http://funwithgovernment.blogspot.com/2009/04/killings-in-thailand-during-military.html
22 'Thailand Court Orders Much of Thaksin Shinawatra's Assets Seized', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 2010.
23 The red-shirted protesters and the opposition accused the government of being behind the assassination – an accusation denied by the government. See 'Gunmen Target Innocent People: CRES', *Bangkok Post*, 17 May 2010.
24 'New Thai Army Chief Named,' *Wall Street Journal*, 3 September 2010, available online at http://thaiintelligentnews.wordpress.com/2010/09/03/wsj-new-thai-army-chief-named
25 Ibid.

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4 Military politics in contemporary Vietnam

Political engagement, corporate interests, and professionalism

Carlyle A. Thayer

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The Vietnam People's Army (VPA), as a military operating in a communist state, has always been subject to the special dynamics typically inherent in the relationship between communist parties and their armed forces. On the one hand, the Vietnam Communist Party (VCP) exercises strict political control over the military, as it does over all other agencies of the state. Military officers are part of, but also subordinate to, the official party hierarchy that dominates the various levels of state and society. On the other hand, however, the communist state grants the armed forces a privileged place in its ideological and political mindset: it is viewed as the indispensable tool of the proletarian class to fight imperialist enemies both within and outside the state. Consequently, the armed forces are integrated permanently into the infrastructure of the state, and their political influence is relatively stable. Nevertheless, fluctuations in the political influence of the VPA have occurred over time, and they have often been indicators not only for change within the armed forces, but for shifts in Vietnamese politics as a whole.

One of these fluctuations was visible in the 1990s. For Vietnam, the decade of the 1990s was framed by two crises: the collapse of the socialist system in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–8. Both of these events exacerbated cleavages among the Vietnamese leadership, which was divided about the scope and pace of economic reform and the degree to which Vietnam should pursue integration with the global market. Fearful that the collapse of the socialist system could make it vulnerable to external security threats, and concerned that it would not be able to stem the challenge of major economic reform without the help of the military, the VCP decided to increase the role of the armed forces in political affairs. As a result, the VPA became a major participant in Vietnam's 'third wave' of state-building (Vasavakul 1997b). Subsequently, retired military officers were selected for state president and party secretary general, and military representation on the VCP's Central Committee increased at both the seventh (1991) and eighth (1996) national party congresses.

This period of military ascendancy was short-lived, however. In 2001, the ninth party congress declined to reappoint the incumbent secretary general (a retired military officer) to a full five-year term and elected a civilian instead. Military representation on the Politburo was reduced by half, leaving it with only one VPA member. It appeared that after Vietnam had overcome the dual threat of the

breakdown of the communist bloc and the Asian monetary meltdown, the VCP was confident enough of its position to return the strength of the military in the party's key bodies to pre-crisis levels. A major study of this period concluded that these developments represented 'not only a process of defining power sharing but also continued party control of the army' (Vasavakul 2001: 338). Vasavakul (2001: 355–356) also made two predictions regarding the future role of the military in Vietnam. First, the VPA would continue to be run by 'political generals' who were 'not likely to become spokespersons for professional officers' even though the military was given increased autonomy over professional matters. Second, the VPA would continue 'to play an important role in shaping the new political, economic, and social order' because the military had become both 'red and entrepreneur', i.e. they had linked their communist identity with both national economic development in general and military-owned businesses in particular.

This chapter will review the military's role in politics from 2001 to the present. Analyzing civil–military relations in Vietnam since Vasavakul's account was published, the chapter argues that while the military's role has undergone some significant adjustments, its overall influence on politics and society has remained at a steady state. Three factors explain this stasis. First, there is consensus among the party leadership that the military should continue to play a role in state-building through national conscription and what is broadly termed 'socialist construction.' Second, the leadership of the VCP continues to accept Marxist-Leninist ideological strictures that legitimize the political role of the military in Vietnam's one-party state. Third, economic development and global integration have replaced the more traditional security concerns of the 1990s as the key drivers of Vietnamese politics. Despite the general level of stability in military–party relations at society level, Vietnam's integration into the global economy has generated external pressures on the VPA to relinquish ownership of its commercial enterprises. This is a potentially significant development that will likely result in a slightly reduced yet stable role of the VPA in national-level politics and a greater concentration on military professionalism.

The chapter also highlights other crucial changes in military–party relations as economic development and national security concerns have become intertwined. This has become particularly apparent as Vietnam's plans to develop its maritime territory in the South China Sea have been challenged by China (Thayer 2008b: 37–41). This has generated pressures on the VPA to modernize its forces, raise its professional standards, and step up international defense cooperation with regional states in order to better defend Vietnam's national sovereignty. In the future, the VPA is likely to be less 'red and entrepreneur', i.e. less ideologically and commercially oriented, and more 'khaki and professional', as military expertise and corporate interests dominate. The following discussion reviews these developments in three parts. Part one presents an historical overview of the military involvement in politics from 1946 to 2001. Part two analyzes the contemporary role of the military in politics, national defense, security affairs, the economy, and society from 2001 to the present. Part three discusses the factors that account for altered influence of the military in national politics and its persistence at societal

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level. The conclusion provides a brief summary of contemporary civil–military relations in Vietnam and the factors that have shaped them.

The military's involvement in politics, 1946–2001

The Vietnam People's Army was founded in 1946. Initially, it comprised a platoon of 34 members led by Vo Nguyen Giap, a political general, communist revolutionary, and a senior member of the Indochinese Communist Party. Since 1946, the VPA has been engaged in armed conflict for a total of 36 years, including the wars against the French (1946–54), the United States (1959–75), and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (1977–89). During and after the Korean War in the early 1950s, China helped the VPA to transform itself from an anti-French guerrilla force into a conventional army. Subsequently, the VPA continued its transformation into a modern regular force during the Vietnam War, this time with Soviet assistance. By 1987, the VPA had 1.26 million troops and was the world's fifth largest standing army.

Despite the VPA's transformation into a formidable military force, it has always remained under firm party control (Thayer 1985: 245–8). The party exercises control over the VPA through the mechanism of 'dual-role' elites. In other words, senior party members simultaneously occupy the highest ranks in the military. From its very origins, the VPA was commanded by so-called 'political generals', i.e. communist revolutionaries who had no prior military experience (Turley 1977). At the same time, party control was reinforced through a parallel structure of political commissars and political officers within the VPA itself, directed by a party–military committee composed of members of the Politburo and the Central Committee. Since 1985, party control over the armed forces has been exercised by the Central Military Party Committee (*Dang Uy Quan Su Trung Uong*).

With the establishment of a communist one-party state, first known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, 1954–75) and subsequently the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV, 1976–present), the VPA has been assigned multiple roles, not the least of which is responsibility for defense of the homeland. The VPA has also been assigned political, internal security, and economic production roles (Thayer 1985: 250–4; Thayer 2001). In the view of party leaders, the military cannot play a politically neutral role because it must carry out its historic mandate as an instrument of maintaining the supremacy of the worker–peasant alliance against its class enemies. However, the multiple roles of the military in Vietnamese society may be accounted for not only by Marxist-Leninist ideology but also by its guerrilla heritage, protracted periods of armed conflict, and external threats to national security. In other words, the VPA has been continually engaged in state-building, economic production, internal security, and national defense. In order to fulfill these roles, the VPA has always been accorded bloc representation on the party's Central Committee (see Table 4.1). Between 1960 and 1982, for example, military representation on the Central Committee averaged 14.6 percent of full members (Thayer 1988). With the adoption of economic reforms (*doi moi*) in 1986, however, military representation declined to seven percent of full members

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Table 4.1 Military representation on VCP executive

Year/Position	*Politburo**		*Central committee**	
Year (Congress)	*Military representation*	*Percent*	*Military representation*	*Percent*
1986 (6th)	2 of 13	15.4	9 of 124	7.3
1991 (7th)	2 of 13	15.4	13 of 146	8.9
1996 (8th)	2 of 19	10.5	17 of 170	10.0
2001 (9th)	1 of 15	6.7	14 of 150	9.3
2006 (10th)	1 of 14	7.1	17 of 160	10.6
2011 (11th)	1 of 14	7.1	19 of 175	10.9
Average		10.4		9.5

Source: The author's personal database on all members of the VCP Central Committee, 1951–present.

Note:
*full members

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(Thayer 1994). Similarly, the VPA's representation on the Politburo has fallen from an average of 20.7 percent in the 1970s and early 1980s to only one member (or 7 percent) in 2011. Since 2001, this single member has been the VPA's most senior general, who simultaneously holds the position of minister of national defense.

In addition to the VPA's representation on the party's Central Committee and Politburo, uniformed military officers stand for election to and serve as deputies in the National Assembly and on its various committees. The minister of national defense is an ex officio member of the cabinet and the National Defense and Security Council. The VPA also plays a political role through the socialization of conscripts into the values of Vietnam's socialist regime. In other words, the VPA acts as one of the main transmission belts for recruitment into the party. Finally, the VPA also played an important role historically in 'socialist construction' through involvement in building infrastructure, economic production, and natural disaster relief.

While VPA engagement in the communist regime has been a constant in Vietnamese politics since the 1940s, its intensity has seen significant fluctuations. For instance, the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s set the stage for a period of military ascendancy in the 1990s. Vietnamese party conservatives and military leaders argued that Vietnam was threatened by a Western 'plot of peaceful evolution'. In 1992, in the shadow of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vietnam promulgated a new state constitution (Vasavakul 1997a). For the first time, the armed forces were charged with 'defense of the socialist regime' in addition to defense of the fatherland. General Le Duc Anh, the former minister of national defense and senior member of the Politburo, was selected president and ex officio commander-in-chief of the armed forces. In 1996, at the eighth national party congress, military representation on the Central Committee temporarily rose to 10 percent, the highest figure since the fourth national party congress in 1976. The following year, Vietnam was struck by 'three typhoons': the Asian Financial

Crisis, a major natural disaster caused by a real typhoon, and massive peasant protests in Thai Binh province. It was in this context that, in December 1997, Lieutenant General Le Kha Phieu, former head of the army's General Political Department (GPD), replaced Do Muoi as VCP secretary general. This marked the first occasion that a retired career military officer was appointed party leader. Significantly, this leadership change took place at a plenary session of the Central Committee and not at a national party congress.

But by the early 2000s Vietnam had largely recovered from the multiple crises of the late 1990s. Vietnam's economy grew at an unprecedented rate, averaging 7.63 percent growth between 2000 and 2007. Further, Vietnam stepped up the pace of economic integration by signing a major bilateral trade agreement with the United States that came into effect in late 2001. As a result, economic development and global integration replaced traditional security concerns as the key drivers of domestic politics. These developments coincided with growing disenchantment within the VCP over the lackluster leadership of Secretary General Phieu and the increasing role of the military in domestic politics. Phieu's position was severely undermined when Central Committee members learned that he had directed the military intelligence service to conduct wire taps on Politburo colleagues (Thayer 2003a). Thus, in April 2001 the Central Committee issued an unprecedented rebuke to the Minister of National Defense, General Pham Van Tra, and the Chief of the General Staff, Le Van Dung. Secretary General Phieu fell victim to this backlash. Although he was endorsed by the Politburo for another term as party leader, this recommendation was overturned by the Central Committee. Phieu was replaced as VCP secretary general at the ninth congress in 2001 (Thayer 2003b). As Vietnam weathered the aftershocks of the collapse of socialism and the Asian Financial Crisis, the military's political role gradually receded. It was now the party's managerial elite that took center stage to manage Vietnam's integration with the global economy.

Military engagement in politics, security affairs, the economy, and society: 2001–2010

While Phieu's replacement signaled a lessening of military influence at the highest echelons of the party, the continuing interference of General Department II (military intelligence) in party affairs provided evidence of the VPA's autonomy within Vietnam's political system. This was also highlighted by the fact that the military as an institution suffered only a minor blowback from Phieu's misuse of the VPA's intelligence service. For example, VPA representation on the Central Committee was reduced only marginally at the ninth national party congress in 2001 from the previous 10 percent to 9.3 percent. Similarly, General Pham Van Tra emerged relatively unscathed. While he was dropped two places in the protocol rankings, he retained his portfolio as minister of national defense and his seat on the Politburo. If there was a main victim in the military, it was General Pham Thanh Ngan, head of the GPD. He was dropped from the Politburo. By contrast, Chief of the General Staff General Le Van Dung retained his seat on the Central

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Committee and was elected to the party's secretariat. Dung also later replaced Thanh as head of the GPD.

Despite Phieu's fall, complaints about the military's interference in politics continued after 2001. In 2004, two of Vietnam's most respected retired military generals wrote private letters to the party's senior leadership charging that the military intelligence service was abusing its power by interfering in internal party affairs (Thayer 2008a). No less a figure that General Vo Nguyen Giap demanded an investigation into the 'extra-legal' activities of General Department II because of the failure of the VCP's key bodies to take appropriate action. General Giap specifically charged that General Department II had attempted to manipulate factionalism in the party by smearing the political reputations of leading figures including himself (Thayer 2008a). In his accusations, General Giap was supported by retired Major General Nguyen Nam Khanh. A pillar of the establishment, Khanh was the former head of the Central Committee's Propaganda and Training Department, former political officer for Military Region 5, and former deputy head of the VPA's GPD. He accused General Department II of 'slandering, intimidation, torture, political assassination', as well as manipulation of internal party factionalism for its own partisan purposes. Khanh documented his allegations by quoting from the classified *News Bulletin* produced by General Department II (Thayer 2008a).

If there is any substance to the allegations raised by generals Giap and Khanh, they demonstrate that key military leaders were actively involved in internal factional politics within the VCP itself. Significantly, it was only in the late 1990s that first attempts were undertaken to bring national security and intelligence agencies under legislative control. For example, the first Ordinance on Intelligence was issued by the chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee in December 1996. In September the following year, the prime minister issued Decree 96/CP on defense intelligence. These documents placed control of the military intelligence service in the hands of the state president and under the 'unified direction of the government'. However, both documents were drafted by the VPA and left it with such extensive powers that it was still able to operate outside of effective party and government control. Even the Law on National Security, passed in November 2004 in an effort to restore party and state oversight of the military, did not severely erode the VPA's power of political intervention. One indication that General Department II had come through this review process unscathed and was seen as a valuable contributor to national security came in March 2008 when then VCP Secretary General Nong Duc Manh awarded it the designation of a 'People's Armed Forces Hero' for 'its remarkable contributions over the past decades'.[1]

The military's ability to maintain its political influence was also reflected in its representation on the VCP's main bodies after the tenth congress in 2006. For instance, VPA representation on the Central Committee rose slightly from 14 members or 9.3 percent (ninth congress) to 17 members or 10.6 percent. Moreover, the composition of the VPA bloc on the Central Committee highlighted the importance that both the party and the military assigned to the VCP–VPA

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relationship. The VPA's 17 members included: the chief of the general staff, head and deputy head of the GPD, head of the Technical General Department, three deputy ministers, the commander of the navy, the political commissar of the Air-Defense Air Force, political commissars for Military Regions 1, 3, 4, 7, and 9, the commander of Military Region 5, the deputy commander/chief of staff for Military Region 2, and the head of the National Defense Academy. In the same vein, the VPA has retained its single seat on the Politburo, with Defense Minister General Pham Van Tra replaced at the tenth congress by General Phung Quang Thanh, the chief of the general staff. Shortly afterwards, General Thanh also became defense minister. Both Generals Tra and Thanh are career regular army officers and represent a break from the 'political generals' who were traditionally appointed in the past.

The analysis of the VPA's involvement in political institutions has pointed to fluctuating, but overall significant, levels of military participation in Vietnamese elite politics. However, assessing military involvement in the political infrastructure is only one way of measuring the quality of civil–military relations in nation-states (Schiff 1995). Accordingly, comparative analysts have often broadened their perspective on civil–military interactions by discussing the interference of the armed forces in other main areas of state affairs: national defense, security affairs, the economy, and society. Accordingly, the following sub-sections review the VPA's engagement in these key arenas of socio-political and security relationships.

The VPA's role in national defense

In terms of its national defense role, the VPA underwent a massive strategic readjustment throughout the 1990s. In 1987, the VPA's main force stood at a massive 1.26 million troops. Within a year of its withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989, however, 600,000 soldiers were discharged. By the end of the 1990s, further manpower reductions left the VPA with 484,000 main force troops (Thayer 1995 and 2000). First and foremost, this drastic drop in troop numbers reflected Vietnam's changed strategic priorities after the end of the Cold War. Revising its prior focus on possible aggression by imperialism, Vietnam began to take note of other, more regional threats. In 1998, Vietnam's first Defense White Paper identified 'hot spots' in the South China Sea as the main external threat to Vietnam (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1998: 18). However, two major strategic missions assigned to the VPA – national defense and economic production – remained the same. Vietnam's second Defense White Paper, issued in 2004, declared, for example, that the main tasks of the armed forces were 'to maintain combat readiness for safeguarding the socialist homeland and making a contribution to the cause of national construction' (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2004: 37).

By 2004, the different strategic environment had dramatically changed Vietnam's place in the world. Vietnam had not only normalized diplomatic relations with all its former enemies, but had avidly sought regional and global integration through membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN

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Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Consequently, the Vietnam People's Army was charged with meeting not only traditional security threats such as territorial conflict in the South China Sea and 'peaceful evolution', but non-traditional threats as well. In this regard, the 2004 White Paper mentioned 'illegal drug trafficking and transportation of weapons, piracy, transnational organized crimes, terrorism, illegal immigration and migration, and degeneration of ecological environment' (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2004: 12).

If Vietnam was still concerned with external ideological enemies, these fears were largely directed at the network of anti-communist overseas Vietnamese living in America, France, Australia, and other Western countries. The 2004 Defense White Paper stated that 'Vietnam is facing the threat of schemes and ploys by external hostile elements in collusion with internal reactionaries to interfere in Vietnam's internal affairs and to cause socio-political unstability [sic] in Vietnam' (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2004: 11–12). While Vietnam regularly expressed concerns about these diaspora groups, in 2009 the government announced that the domestic security situation had 'stabilized' even though 'hostile forces … [continued] to incite violence and separatism is some areas of the country' (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2009: 16, 18). The improved internal security situation enabled further troop reductions throughout the 2000s. Between 2001 and 2005, for instance, 29,000 soldiers were discharged, bringing manpower strength down to 455,000, a force level that was also maintained in subsequent years. At the same time, official Vietnamese figures showed that the defense budget as a proportion of GDP fluctuated between 1.8 and 2.5 percent between 2004 and 2008

Table 4.2 Vietnam's defense budget as percent of GDP, 1999–2009 (in billion US dollars)

Year	*VPA size**	*Defense budget (DB)***	*GDP***	*DB as % of GDP***
1999	484,000	2.1	34.5	6.0
2000	484,000	2.6	36.8	7.2
2001	484,000	3.1	39.4	7.9
2002	484,000	2.6	42.2	6.2
2003	484,000	2.6	45.3	5.8
2004	484,000	3.0	48.8	6.1
2005	455,000	3.2	52.9	6.0
2006	455,000	3.2	57.3	5.6
2007	455,000	3.7	62.1	5.2
2008	455.000	2.1	66.0	3.2
2009	455,000	2.1	69.0	3.0

Sources: *International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (1999–2000 to 2010); **Defence Intelligence Organisation, *Defence Economic Trends in the Asia-Pacific* (2009: 27).

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(Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2004: 35; Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2009: 38) These figures have been discounted as too low by outside analysts, however (see Table 4.2).

Despite the downsizing of the military and the decline in the overall proportion of the defense budget, expenditure on the armed forces nevertheless increased in absolute terms between 2002 and 2007. This was due to the VPA's efforts to meet its defense responsibilities by embarking on a selective program of upgrading existing stocks of serviceable weapons, force modernization, increasing military professionalism, and stepping up international defense cooperation. As a result, Vietnam's spending on defense rose from US$ 2.6 billion in 2000 to US$ 3.7 billion in 2007, with significant funds allocated to the VPA's modernization program. However, the defense budget was reduced precipitously in 2008 and 2009 when the Global Financial Crisis impacted on Vietnam (see Figure 4.1).

The onset of Vietnam's current force modernization program can be traced to the mid-1990s (Thayer 1997). Since that time, Vietnam has been seeking to develop a deterrent capability in the South China Sea through the acquisition of modern Svetlyak-class fast attack craft and Gephard-class frigates armed with surface-to-surface missiles, six Kilo-class conventional submarines and the Bastion land-based anti-ship cruise missile. Vietnam has also modestly modernized its air force through upgrade programs for its MiG-21s and Su-22s, and the acquisition of a handful of Su-27 and twenty Su-30 jet fighters armed with advanced air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles. The air-defense force has acquired a new generation of surface-to-air missiles. Vietnam's force modernization program has also stressed the development of self-reliant capabilities in its national defense industry through co-production and technology transfers at the lower end of the technology scale (Thayer 2009b).

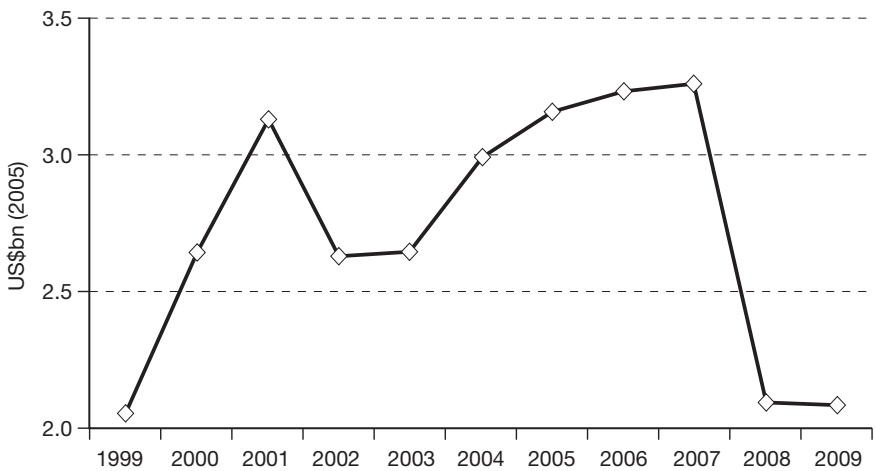

Figure 4.1 Vietnam's defense budget, 1999–2009 (in billion US dollars)
Source: Defence Intelligence Organisation, *Defence Economic Trends in the Asia-Pacific*, (2009: 27).

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The VPA's modernization program, coupled with Vietnam's increasing integration into regional and global networks, has produced pressures to step up the pace of military professionalism to ensure that the officer corps is capable of engaging with ASEAN partners, absorbing new technologies, and meeting the wide range of responsibilities it has been assigned. In order to ensure that VPA officers keep abreast of and are assimilated to international standards of military professionalism and education, Vietnam has begun introducing wide-ranging educational reforms since the late 1990s. Similarly, Vietnam's program of professional military education (PME) and training has been enhanced in order to improve the skills and qualifications of the officer corps. In addition, VPA officers are being sent abroad in increasing numbers to attend professional development courses in countries such as Australia, India, Malaysia, and the United States. In 2008, Vietnam hosted its first PME course for foreign military officers. Finally, Vietnam has markedly intensified international defense cooperation through the exchange of high-level delegations, negotiation of defense cooperation and arms and technology procurement agreements, sending observers to foreign military exercises, and, most recently, joint patrols and exercises with regional navies (Thayer 2008b).

The military and domestic security

As noted above, the 2004 Defense White Paper assigned the VPA a domestic role in security affairs, primarily through countering the 'threat of peaceful evolution'. The VPA has been very circumspect, however, about involving itself in direct confrontation with the public, preferring to see the ministry of public security's armed police take the lead role in dealing with public protests, riots, and violent demonstrations. Nevertheless, in February and March 2001 the VPA was deployed to the Central Highlands to deal with an outbreak of unrest by several thousand members of mostly Christian ethnic minorities (known as the Degar peoples or the Montagnards) in three provinces. These disturbances received much attention because they took place on the eve of the ninth national party congress. National security authorities were quick to blame 'outside hostile forces'. In particular, they pointed to the FULRO (*Front Unifié Pour la Libération des Races Opprimées*, United Front for the Liberation of the Oppressed Races). The FULRO was an ethno-nationalist separatist movement of highland ethnic minorities that dated to the 1960s but had persisted in its struggle after unification well into the 1990s.

When unrest broke out in 2001, at least 13 VPA regiments were posted to the Central Highlands to provide security by manning checkpoints and securing the border with Cambodia.[2] Soldiers were billeted with local families, while political cadres directed a campaign of political education designed to calm the situation and prevent illegal departures to Cambodia. But renewed unrest erupted in 2004, which Vietnamese security authorities blamed on the alleged instigation of the Montagnard Foundation in the United States. The Montagnard Foundation is an organization comprised of highland ethnic minorities who worked with US Special Forces during the Vietnam War. Evidently, this linkage between domestic ethnic

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minorities and the Montagnard Foundation is an example of what the Vietnamese government considers to be the 'threat of peaceful evolution'.

Although the security situation has been brought largely under control, ethnic minority unrest continues to concern central authorities. In February 2007, for example, the National Defense and Security Council discussed plans 'to boost national defense and security in strategic areas' including the Central Highlands, border regions, and the northwest.[3] In this context, the VPA Border Guard has been given responsibility for combating illegal drug trafficking and transportation of weapons, illegal immigration and migration, as well as other transnational criminal activities, which are particularly prevalent in the border areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. According to the 2010 Freedom House report on Vietnam (Gainsborough 2010: 10), the situation in the Central Highlands has remained volatile, and 'unrest has recently increased over land disputes resulting from confiscations to develop large state-owned coffee plantations'. The Central Highlands, it appears, will continue to figure prominently on the VPA's domestic security agenda for the foreseeable future.

But security operations are not the only VPA instrument to address the unrest in the Central Highlands. The armed forces have also long been involved in developing infrastructure and providing social welfare services in the Central Highlands. An estimated 20,000 households belonging to the families of soldiers and militia have been settled in so-called economic-defense zones in Dak Lak and Binh Phuoc provinces (Thayer and Hervouet 2004: 373–4; Thayer forthcoming: 466–7). Army Corporation 15, the 15th Army Corps, and the Dak To Army Corps have been involved in land reclamation, infrastructure and housing construction, irrigation and water supply, forestry, education, and public health. According to Freedom House, however, 'such programs are often implemented within government-controlled parameters and perceived by minority populations as aimed at weakening their unique cultural and linguistic identity' (Gainsborough 2010: 10). Moreover, the VPA has assisted lowland Vietnamese to resettle in the Central Highlands where cleared land has been turned over for the cultivation of cash crops such as coffee, rubber, cashew nuts, cotton, pepper, maize, and green beans. Not surprisingly, these resettlement programs have been controversial; like the military-sponsored transmigration programs in Indonesia, they have brought not only development to remote areas, but also a host of social problems. As the economy grows and intra-Vietnamese migration intensifies, it will remain the responsibility of the VPA to help the ministry of public security in keeping these tensions under control.

The VPA's economic activities

In addition to its national defense and internal security roles, the VPA is also charged with making 'a contribution to the cause of national construction'. There are many facets to this role, including assisting with socio-economic development, poverty reduction, and natural disaster response and mitigation. However, the most prominent role of the VPA in national construction takes the form of direct ownership of national defense industries and commercial enterprises.

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The VPA's involvement in commercial activities began in the 1980s with the adoption of *doi moi* (Thayer 2003a). In March 1989, nine major army economic construction units were converted into legal entities (corporations or general corporations) under Decree 46 issued by the Council of Ministers. These new corporations were permitted to operate on the same legal basis as state-owned enterprises, including obtaining credit from state banks and forming joint ventures with foreign partners. In a short period of time, there was a marked rise in the number of military-owned corporations and a rapid expansion of their economic and commercial activities. These corporations became important generators of revenue and, by the early 1990s, they had 'massively broadened their production' of consumer goods.[4] In 1993, the army set up its first joint stock commercial bank. In the following year, there were over 330 army-run commercial businesses, including 60 military-owned enterprises operated by regular units. The number of joint ventures with foreign partners jumped from 49 in 1995 to 67 in 2003. The scope of the army's commercial activities embraced consumer goods, garments and textiles, automobile manufacturing, construction work, ship and plane repair, hotels and real estate, mechanical engineering, as well as telephone, fax, and internet services.

In line with national policy to reform the state-owned enterprise sector, however, military-owned enterprises were also required to restructure from the mid-1990s onwards. There were two major waves of enterprise reforms (Thayer forthcoming: 463–8). The first lasted from 1995 to 1997 and resulted in the reduction of the number of military-run corporations from 335 to 193, mainly through mergers. Nonetheless, a number of these mergers took place only on paper and the reforms of the first wave did little to generate the capital necessary to update old equipment and outmoded technology. A second wave of reforms was initiated in May 1998 in a directive issued by the Central Military Party Committee. The main aim of these reforms was to improve the efficiency of military corporations and increase their capacity to undertake major projects. At that time, the number of military enterprises was reduced to 164, following the Committee's directive that called for unprofitable firms to be dissolved. The directive further decreed that army divisions, provincial units, and specialized departments within the defense ministry were barred from operating commercial enterprises. In late 1999, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai directed that military corporations rationalize their commercial activities (Thayer forthcoming: 465). In order to oversee this process, the economics division of the General Department of National Defense Industry and Economics was upgraded to the status of an independent economics department within the defense ministry.

It would appear that the second wave of reform of army enterprises did not have a major impact. The VPA defended its corporate interests and business continued more or less as usual. In fact, it was estimated in 2001 that the number of companies operated by the VPA had risen again to 200, at least 40 of which were joint ventures, with an annual turnover estimated at US$ 320 million.[5] In 2001, the military's telecommunications company, Viettel, entered the lucrative internet and mobile phone markets to directly compete with state enterprises. By 2003,

the revenues generated by military-owned enterprises had shot up to US$ 653.6 million.[6] Moreover, the Military Commercial Joint Stock Bank raised its chartered capital in 2003 to enable it to provide credit to large projects.

But the military's growing economic and commercial interests directly clashed with the imperatives of global economic integration when Vietnam became a member of the World Trade Organization. In 2007, it was estimated that the army still owned about 140 companies and held shares in more than 20 additional firms in almost every sector of the economy. These enterprises reportedly generated US$ 2 billion in revenue in 2006.[7] Trying to address both internal and international pressures in this field, the Central Committee passed a resolution in January 2007 requiring that all business enterprises operated by the army, public service, party, and mass organizations be placed under state management. The decision specified, however, that the VPA would retain ownership and control over companies that were directly related to national defense and security. While the process of handing over ownership of all other companies was due to begin before the end of 2007, it soon became evident that this deadline was unrealistic. In December 2007, Defense Minister General Phung Quang Thanh stated that his ministry would hand over around 140 military-owned commercial enterprises to the state by 2012 and 'focus on training and building up a regular modern army'[8]

In 2008, the National Assembly adopted the Ordinance on Defense Industry that provided the legal basis for the transfer of military-run businesses and set out the principles and legal framework for national defense industries to be retained by the defense ministry. Plans to divest the defense ministry of its business enterprises appeared to gather steam in April 2008 when the Prime Minister issued instructions for the divestiture of 113 military-owned enterprises.[9] While the initiative led to the divestment, restructuring, or disbanding of small military businesses, it allowed the VPA and the defense ministry to hold on to their most precious asset, Viettel, and nine other major general corporations (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2009: 119). In January 2010, Viettel was officially acknowledged as one of Vietnam's eight largest economic groups, and the first to be run by the Defense Ministry. In addition to its core telecommunication business, Viettel was allowed to branch out into the field of military information technology – meeting the criteria set out in the 2007 decree that made it possible for the VPA to maintain control over enterprises directly related to national security interests. Accordingly, Viettel remains an important source of income for the military, despite the government's overall strategy to reduce VPA involvement in commercial activities. Viettel has increased its revenues 1,500 times within 10 years, from US$ 2.1 million in 1999 to US$ 3.2 billion in 2009.[10] Indeed, investing heavily in Cambodia, Laos, and even Haiti, Viettel has emerged as one of Southeast Asia's most profitable military businesses.

The armed forces and society

The fourth area of military politics relates to the way the VPA engages with society, both directly and indirectly. The VPA's direct influence on society is exercised not only through its 455,000 soldiers and their families, but also through nearly

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five million reserves, militia, and other paramilitary forces. In addition, there are over one and a half million members of the Vietnam Veterans' Association, not including their dependent households. In addition, the VPA interacts with society through two major mechanisms: national conscription and compulsory defense education.

Vietnam has maintained a system of national conscription since the late 1950s. Currently, all males aged between 17 and 45 and women aged between 18 and 40 who hold professional skills are required to register with the offices of the military command at the commune, ward, or district where they reside. New recruits are given six months basic training and then assigned to units that engage in road building, planting trees, or other infrastructure projects. At present, nearly one million men reach military age each year. Legally, all healthy males are eligible for service, but there is a long list of exemptions, including deferments for students. Military service is generally sought after by youths from rural areas, while there is a palpable aversion to military service by their urban counterparts, especially those from well-off families who either pay bribes or enroll their sons in part-time classes and university preparatory courses to avoid the draft. Nevertheless, as a result of the massive reduction in the size of the regular army, Vietnam has had little difficulty in meeting its manpower requirements.[11] Due to the competing demands of the country's market economy, however, the VPA has found it difficult to attract educationally qualified individuals.

The VPA has also long provided vocational training for soldiers slated for demobilization. Prior to the adoption of *doi moi*, demobilized soldiers were returned to their former employers who were required to provide them with a job. During the difficult transition from a centrally planned to a market economy, however, the VPA became involved in vocational training in order to reduce the burden on businesses. During the five-year period from 1996 to 2001, the defense ministry set up three technical colleges and 18 job promotion centers capable of handling 35,000 trainees a year for both long- and short-term courses. In the same period, 80,000 demobilized soldiers were given vocational training and 45,000 demobilized soldiers were assisted by job promotion centers in finding employment.[12]

The second mechanism through which the VPA exercises influence in society is through an extensive program of defense education for high school and university students, government officials, community leaders, and religious dignitaries. In May 2001, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai signed Directive No. 15/2001 On Defense Education in all colleges, universities, and schools belonging to administrative agencies and political and social organizations. Both the defense ministry and the ministry of education and training were given responsibility for carrying out the directive. In August of that year, the prime minister established the Central Council for Military Education, which included many senior government officials. The Council oversaw, among other things, the redrafting of the curriculum for national defense education. This education and its curriculum were made compulsory for all students in senior high school and above. During the 2006 school year, for example, over three million students from 2,866 schools and universities attended national defense education courses. Textbooks and study

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documents were jointly prepared by the defense ministry, the VCP Organization and Personnel Commission, and the ministry of education and training. In addition, the VPA General Political Department and the VCP Ideology and Culture Commission organized training courses on national defense for more than 100 leaders, editors, and journalists from central press agencies.

Defense education courses were also run by military regional commands. In March 2007, for example, Military Region 5 reported that it had conducted courses for over half a million persons in the previous year. At the same time, Military Region 4 High Command conducted its 21st course on defense education for directors and vice directors of colleges, universities, high schools, and state-owned enterprises. The following month, the High Command of Military Region 9 concluded its 23rd defense education course for 86 provincial officials from the Mekong Delta. This defense education program is significant because it brings Vietnam's educated youth and other members of society into contact with the armed forces and its officers. Most importantly, they are introduced to – if not indoctrinated with – the military's conservative views on national security. Furthermore, the series of defense education courses provides important legitimation for the political role of the armed forces in Vietnam's one-party state and for the military's roles in domestic affairs.

Like many other militaries in Southeast Asia, the VPA also tries to influence society through the mass media. One way of achieving this aim is though the publication of its mass daily, *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* (*People's Army*), with a weekday circulation of several hundred thousand copies. The VPA also publishes *Van Nghe Quan Doi* (the Army Literature and Arts Magazine), a popular literature magazine. In addition, the military has its own publishing house, Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan (People's Army Publishing House), that produces books on military history and biographies of military heroes. Although the military does not own radio or television stations, it does produce a variety of popular programs for the state-run network. Through efforts like these, which complement its deep involvement in defense education, the VPA remains a fixture in the daily lives of ordinary Vietnamese.

Explaining the level of military involvement in politics

Samuel Huntington (1991) coined the term 'third wave' to describe the global process of democratization that took place in the 15-year period following the military coup in Portugal in April 1974. Huntington estimated that during this period, 30 countries underwent a transition from authoritarian to democratic rule. Since Huntington's study was published, a further eight countries arguably made a similar transition in the Asia-Pacific region. The list includes Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Mongolia, Taiwan, South Korea, Timor-Leste, and Pakistan. Several of these countries have suffered reversals, such as Pakistan and Thailand, but have since experienced fresh democratic transitions (with the situation in Thailand remaining highly volatile). Processes of democratic transition have almost invariably resulted in attempts by political elites to place the military under civilian control; but civilian control has not necessarily ended the military's engagement in domestic politics.

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In his study of civil–military relations in the Asia-Pacific, Muthiah Alagappa (2001) noted that since the mid-1980s, there has been a clear trend in reduction in the political power of militaries across the region. In the same vein, Vasavakul (2001: 356) concluded her study of the military in Vietnam by arguing that the VPA in 2001 was 'likely [to continue] to play an important role in shaping the new political, economic, and social order' in the future, because it had successfully altered its role from 'revolutionary heroes to red entrepreneurs', and political generals would continue to defend the army's commercial interests. In other words, Vietnam appeared unlikely to be influenced by regional trends identified by Alagappa.

The case study presented in this chapter suggests that while some of Vasavakul's predictions made in 2001 have been proven to be accurate, others have been overtaken by events. First, her use of the term 'political generals' (taken from Turley 1977) no longer accurately describes the individuals who have taken command of the VPA after 2001. General Phung Quang Thanh, for example, is a product of professional military education in Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Second, Vasavakul's use of the term 'red' is somewhat misleading because it resonates with the term 'red and expert' used to describe tensions in Chinese civil–military relations in the 1960s. While Vietnam justifies party dominance over the military on ideological grounds, it has never gone to such extremes as China during the Cultural Revolution. Third, Vietnam's military entrepreneurs have lost influence within the VPA's institutional hierarchy, with much of the military's economic power now almost exclusively concentrated in Viettel – a company run not only by generals, but by professional managers as well – and nine other general corporations controlled by regional military commands.

It appears, then, that since 2001 the VPA has aspired to achieve the levels of military professionalism and force modernization necessary for its mission of defending Vietnam's territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea. In this context, the VPA has relinquished some of its influence over the party, state, and the economy, while it increased its authority over its internal military affairs. Nevertheless, the VPA has remained politically influential, confirming Vasavakul's overall prediction of stable civil–military relations in Vietnam. To begin with, the interests of Vietnam's military establishment continue to be represented by its members on the VCP Central Committee and by the VPA's most senior general on the Politburo. Similarly, the VPA continues to play an influential role in society through oversight of militia, self-defense and reserve forces, a large veterans network, conscription, and defense education courses. Hence, the notion of declining military influence that some observers have postulated for other Southeast Asian states does not accurately capture the dynamics underway in Vietnam. The following section analyses the reasons for this phenomenon.

VPA involvement in politics: key factors

In the scholarly literature on civil–military relations, many authors have pointed to four main variables that can explain the trajectory of military engagement in the politics of particular nation-states: historical legacies, quality of civilian

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governance, international influence, and internal military culture. This section discusses the relevance of these four factors for the case of Vietnam, beginning with *historical legacies*. Today's VPA still carries many features that date back to its foundation amidst Vietnam's struggle against French colonial rule. Significantly, the political role of the VPA was determined at the outset by Marxist-Leninist ideology, according to which the VPA was an instrument of the worker-peasant alliance to seize power from the capitalist class. The subsequent prolonged wars against the French and the United States seemed to confirm this Marxist-Leninist premise of historical determinism, providing the foundation for the VPA's national defense, internal security, and political roles.

The independence struggle and the war against the United States also account for the VPA's wide-ranging engagement with society. The VPA's war ethos, enshrined in current doctrine, stresses the importance of maintaining large reserve, militia, and self-defense forces, and calls for the active involvement of the main forces in economic production, socialist construction, and other state-building activities. But while the wars had a formative and lasting influence on the VPA and Vietnamese society, the grounds for the military's institutional involvement in politics were laid in periods of relative peace. Most importantly, the VPA's current role as one of the main components of the communist system has its roots in Vietnam's periods of political consolidation, such as the establishment of the DRV in 1954 and the SRV in 1976. Consequently, the VPA became one of the four main pillars of the regime, alongside the party, the state, and the Vietnam Fatherland Front (an umbrella group for mass organizations). The VPA's bloc representation on the party's Central Committee and in the National Assembly is a product of these periods. As a result, political and military roles became fused, and they remain so today.

Another factor in explaining the levels of military participation in politics is the *quality of civilian governance*. Militaries find it difficult to interfere in or assume dominance over political affairs if civilian groups run effective and stable governments. This link between the effectiveness of civilian governance and military participation in politics has also been obvious in Vietnam. Military engagement in politics increased in the late 1990s, when the Asian Financial Crisis threatened Vietnam's economic growth, but it decreased soon after the economic problems had been resolved. Since 2006, civilian Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and his cabinet have taken the lead in managing the economy, delivering high levels of economic growth, improved public services, and political stability. While there have been some divisions in the ruling elite, particularly in response to the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, these did not undermine the effectiveness of the government as a whole. In 2006, for example, Vietnam witnessed the emergence of a network of pro-democracy dissidents known as Bloc 8406 (from the date of their founding) and other political activists who challenged one-party rule. However, this group has so far not posed a serious challenge to the legitimacy, power, and durability of Vietnam's regime (Thayer 2009a; Thayer 2010).

One vital element in the increasing strength of civilian rule has been the enhanced prominence of the legislature and cabinet in governance. Significantly,

Prime Minister Dung has used legislation and executive decisions to regulate and control military affairs. For example, Vietnam's 2004 Defense White Paper noted that the National Assembly 'has promulgated the Military Service Law, the Service Regulations Law for Vietnam People's Army Officers, and the National Frontier Law', while the state president has ratified, among others, 'the State Laws on Ready Reserve Force, Militia and Self-Defense Forces' (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2004: 33–4). Since the White Paper was published, the state president has promulgated further defense legislation, such as the Law on National Defense (2007), Ordinance on Vietnamese Marine Police (2008), and Ordinance on the Defense Industry (2008). Apparently, Vietnam's legislative effort has updated and amended outmoded ordinances and filled in legal gaps to keep up with Vietnam's transition to a market economy. In 2009, for example, the National Assembly passed the Law on Militia and Self-Defense Forces, inter alia, to require privatized state-owned enterprises to raise and train self-defense forces. The importance of Vietnam's growing package of defense legislation is that it provides a regulatory framework for state control over the armed forces and a legal basis for the many domestic roles of the armed forces. But despite this increasing empowerment of civilian government, the experience of the late 1990s has also shown that VCP leaders continue to rely on the VPA whenever they feel that domestic stability could be undermined by economic crisis or external security threats.

The third factor highlighted by scholars as playing a crucial role in determining the level of military participation in politics is related to *international influences*. Since the mid-1980s, however, Vietnam's regime has largely insulated itself from external influences that could undermine one-party rule or alter existing civil–military relations. For instance, Vietnam successfully weathered the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union by implementing economic reforms that made it independent from Moscow's financial support (Thayer and Hervouet 2004: 363–6). Similarly, Vietnam's membership in ASEAN and the ARF since the mid-1990s has not impacted significantly on the internal dynamics of Vietnam's regime. Neither ASEAN nor the ARF require members to meet certain benchmarks in terms of their democratic quality or civil–military relations. Nonetheless, Vietnam's increasing integration into the Southeast Asian region has led VPA generals to intensify their defense cooperation activities with external states. This has taken the form of reciprocal high-level visits, naval port calls, and defense education exchanges. The net result of this process has been to socialize Vietnam's military leaders into new values and norms governing the domestic and external roles of the armed forces. These external influences have combined with domestic pressures (such as the divestment of most military-run commercial enterprises) to refocus the military's role in national politics to the promotion of greater military professionalism. However, none of this has reduced the military's long-standing stake in the regime and society at large.

Fourth and finally, scholars of civil–military relations tend to emphasize the importance of *internal military factors*. In recent years, the most important development in this field has been the push for increased military professionalism in the VPA. Since the 1980s, there is some evidence that a debate has taken place within

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the VPA over the relative influence of political commissars on professional matters. Over time, and after some experimentation, the role of political officers has been supplanted by the 'one commander system' (FitzGerald 1989). Today, the balance has shifted in favor of career professionals who must prepare the VPA for modern wars. In this regard, Vietnam has drawn lessons from both Iraq wars as well as from the modernization of China's People's Liberation Army. The increased stress on professionalism notwithstanding, the military's current bloc representation on the party Central Committee is likely to remain stable, reflecting the VPA's corporate interests. In the same vein, the planned divestment of the majority of military businesses by 2012 has supported the trend towards the military's professionalization to some extent, but the VPA continues to hold on to Viettel and nine other general corporations as cash cows and sources of employment for military personnel.

Conclusion

The role of the military in a communist political system represents a distinct sub-set of civil–military relations. Classical civil–military relations theory argues that the military should eschew a political role in order to enhance its professional military competence in external defense. But in Leninist political systems the military almost invariably plays a domestic political role in order to ensure the survival of the socialist regime. Vietnam, for example, amended its state constitution after the collapse of the Soviet Union to explicitly identify 'defense of the socialist regime' as one of the military's core missions. Accordingly, the VPA continues to be heavily involved in Vietnam's political institutions. Most senior officers are members of the VCP, and the military selects its own delegates to attend national party congresses. The VPA is given bloc representation on the party Central Committee and representation in the Politburo. Similarly, active duty military officers stand for election to and serve as deputies in the National Assembly, and the most senior military officer serves as defense minister and has a seat in Cabinet.

While the involvement of the VPA in politics and society has experienced fluctuations over time, the overall trend of civil–military relations in Vietnam since the early 2000s has been marked by stasis. Regional and global advances towards democratization and depoliticization of the military have not impacted on Vietnam in similar fashion as elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific. Vietnam reduced the role of military officers in the upper echelons of the VCP to some extent (the post of VCP secretary general was returned to civilian hands in 2001 after being held by a retired general for four years), but VPA representation in state and party bodies has remained relatively stable. In the same vein, the VCP's Central Committee has ordered the military (and other state bodies as well) to relinquish ownership of their commercial enterprises by 2012, but the VPA's continued control over Viettel and nine major general corporations will allow the military to retain a sound economic power base. In addition, the VPA is certain to continue to play a major role in society at large through national conscription; the maintenance of large

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reserves, militia, and self-defense forces; defense education; and socio-economic development in economic-defense zones.

Despite the VPA's continued entrenchment in political, social, and economic affairs, however, there have been signs of increasing professionalism within the military as a defense force. This has taken the form of enhanced military education and training, both at home and abroad, in order to better manage the process of force modernization now underway. At the same time, Vietnam is widening its military engagement with the region and the world. Thus, while Vietnam's communist regime and its armed forces have so far successfully withstood domestic and international pressures for democratization and less politicized civil–military relations, the generals seem to have developed a greater interest in traditional areas of defense affairs.

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Notes

1 *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, 25 March 2008.
2 *Agence France-Presse*, 27 April 2001.
3 *Vietnam News Service*, 27 February 2007.
4 *Vietnam News Agency*, 21 February 1993.
5 *Jane's World Armies* electronic edition.
6 *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, 7 January 2003.
7 *Thanh Nien*, 31 January 2007.
8 *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, 19 December 2007.
9 *Viet Nam News*, 4 April 2008.
10 *Viet Nam News*, 13 January 2010.
11 In order to address potential over-supply of conscripts, in July 2005 Vietnam reduced the length of compulsory service from two years to 18 months, and lowered the age of eligibility for military service from the 18–27 year range to 18–25 years. Individuals aged 26 and 27 were shunted into the reserves. The term of service for persons holding technical qualifications or serving in the navy was reduced from three to two years.
12 *Vietnam News Agency*, 30 May 2001.

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5 The military in Philippine politics

Still politicized and increasingly autonomous

Aries A. Arugay

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Much time has passed since the Philippine state began its process of re-democratization with the ouster of long-time autocrat Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Some democratic reforms have taken place since then, but instituting civilian control over the military has remained a significant challenge for government leaders. While not aspiring to establish direct military rule, members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have engaged in more subtle and complex forms of political participation which are in conflict with the norms, principles, and practices typically associated with democratic civil–military relations, or CMR (Pion-Berlin 2001). The AFP's practices include occupying positions within the civilian bureaucracy and assuming a dominant role in security policy, specifically in dealing with the communist insurgency and the separatist movement in Mindanao. The AFP leadership has also been able to have a say in key political appointments, challenge the legitimacy of the civilian government, and become a major player in presidential power games. In more sinister ways, the military's newfound confidence and political autonomy have also been evident in its alleged involvement in electoral manipulation and the systematic persecution of political dissidents from the left of the political spectrum.

To a great extent, the military's post-Marcos renaissance started with the breakdown of the impeachment trial against President Joseph Estrada, which prompted the largest mobilization of civil society since the 1986 'People Power' revolt. With the persuasion of the political opposition, the military withdrew its allegiance to the popular but corrupt president, effectively causing his downfall. This 'extra-constitutional' removal of a democratically elected president paved the way for the ascent of then Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to the presidency in 2001. A daughter of a former president and an economist by training, Arroyo offered a platform of good governance and political reform, promising to lead by example and build strong institutions. By the end of her tenure in 2010, however, she had been largely discredited by attempted coups, political scandals, corruption allegations, and questions about her legitimacy as president. Despite these affairs, Arroyo managed to survive with the help of the military, leaving it increasingly politicized, deeply factionalized, and considerably more powerful. Indeed, her government has arguably contributed to raising the possibility of future military intervention in the Philippines.

What are the reasons behind the increase in the military's influence in the post-transition Philippines? How did the military obtain more political autonomy in a supposedly democratic regime?[1] Not surprisingly, many ordinary Filipinos and political commentators have pointed to the actions of then President Arroyo. But consulting the scholarly literature on military involvement in politics can unravel the deeper factors that have been at work in the Philippines (Pion-Berlin 2001; Alagappa 2001). Promotion of financial and other material interests is one explanation often advanced in the academic debate on the political activism of militaries. Despite the AFP's expanding role in the country's political affairs, however, the Philippines have recorded the lowest levels of military spending in Southeast Asia (Arugay 2010). Perhaps a more powerful explanation could be found in the legacies of coercion in governance left by colonialism and the significant position given to the military during martial law (Hedman 2001). While this argument may have its merits, it cannot account for the relatively cordial relations between the military and the government of then President Fidel V. Ramos (1992–8) and the successful implementation of several military reforms in the first part of the Arroyo presidency (2001–4). In other words, the historical argument is incapable of explaining the fluctuation in the degrees of military political autonomy in the post-authoritarian era. This chapter therefore explores an alternative proposition, arguing that the military's increased strength after 2001 has been the result of elite conflict and the consequent weakness of political institutions tasked to perform civilian oversight over the armed forces.

An explanation focused on political conflict and the quality of democratic institutions can satisfactorily account for the increase in the military's power since 2001. This chapter illustrates how institutions have been unable to perform their functions during times of severe political turbulence, starting from Estrada's aborted impeachment to the scandal over Arroyo's alleged electoral manipulations and other subsequent crises under her presidency. The chapter also uses the political conflict lens to explain the transformation of the Arroyo administration from a government that was serious in building institutions and implementing military reform (2001–4) to one that accepted the military as a significant political actor and a partner in governance (2004–10). Most importantly, it was strong pressure from actors within the political opposition and civil society over her lack of legitimacy that convinced Arroyo that she had to rely on the military to guarantee her political survival. Finally, using an approach that looks at the effectiveness of institutions helps to understand why the AFP has seldom acted as a monolithic actor, with the military exhibiting a lack of cohesion quite similar to other political institutions in the Philippines. By exploiting these divisions within both civilian institutions and the armed forces, Arroyo successfully built a strong base of support consisting of key segments of the AFP. In turn, these dynamics explain why attempts to unseat Arroyo were carried out not by the AFP as an institutional collective, but by marginalized factions within it.

This chapter begins with an overview of the history of military involvement in Philippine politics before 2001. It then proceeds to a discussion of the breadth and depth of the military's participation in post-2001 politics and society, and assesses

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the quality of the democratic institutions mandated to control the armed forces. The third part demonstrates how intra-civilian conflict, the absence of political will to build and strengthen institutions, and the lack of respect for democratic procedures have been responsible for the increase of the military's political influence. Finally, the chapter's conclusion discusses some of the implications of a politically autonomous and influential military for the future of Philippine CMR and the quality of the country's democracy.

The Philippine military: a brief history

The historical roots of the AFP lie in the formation of the Philippine Constabulary (PC) by the United States in 1901, followed by the official creation of the Philippine Army in 1935.[2] The United States, which had taken control of the Philippines from Spain in 1898, initially used the Constabulary in order to fight the remaining troops of Emilio Aguinaldo, who resisted American occupation and demanded immediate independence for the Philippines (Pobre 2000). From its colonial past, the later AFP primarily inherited a distinct fixation on internal security tasks. While the United States developed the military as a domestic security instrument to be used against pockets of resistance across the country, it also discouraged the AFP from evolving into an externally oriented defense force by effectively erecting a US 'defense shield' that deflected potential external threats (Hernandez 1979). This focus on domestic security matters was only temporarily interrupted by the integration of the AFP into the US Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), which first lost to the invading Japanese forces in 1942 but subsequently recaptured the archipelago in 1944.

American colonialism also shaped the civilian political institutions responsible for the management and supervision of the Philippine military. The 1935 Constitution established the president as the commander-in-chief of the AFP, laying the foundation for the military's development into a key element of presidential politics in the Philippines. While a civilian defense secretary was tasked with day-to-day oversight of the army, the president was given wide-ranging powers over military appointments and policies. In order to balance the president's authority, however, the legislature was granted oversight functions through its powers of confirmation of appointments and promotions, its control over the defense budget, and its rights of investigation into possible military abuses (Hernandez 1984). This tension between presidential and legislative claims on controlling the military, as entrenched in the 1935 Constitution, has left strong legacies for the patterns of CMR in the Philippines today.

But pre-independence experiences also predisposed the development of the AFP in another, probably even more significant way: unlike its Indonesian and Burmese counterparts, the Philippine military did not wrench independence violently from its colonial power. Instead, the US handed over authority to a civilian Philippine government in an orderly and largely amicable manner in 1946. This meant that the AFP lacked the narrative of a heroic independence struggle upon which it could base demands for political hegemony (Loveman 1999; Stepan 1988).

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Instead, well-connected and land-owning civilians became the dominant political class, while the AFP continued to display the characteristics of a colonial army (Janowitz 1964). Neither 'national interests of security nor the political dynamics of reconstruction' (Hedman 2001: 170) dictated its reorganization after the Second World War, and it consequently remained an internal security force at the disposal of civilians. The US also played a role in maintaining the AFP's post-war internal orientation by demanding that it protect the government from its domestic enemies, whether communist or separatist, armed or unarmed. This trend was reinforced in 1950, when the Philippine Constabulary became the fourth major service (apart from the army, navy, and air force) within the AFP and was assigned to maintain internal peace and order (Hernandez 1985b).

It was not surprising, then, that the first major post-independence challenge to the AFP was a domestic insurgency: the peasant-led *Hukbalahap*,[3] effectively the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), launched serious campaigns against the government from 1946 to 1954. Under the direction of Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay, the AFP developed a two-pronged approach to the Huk rebellion: it engaged the rebels militarily in a systematic and aggressive manner, but also distributed food and other goods to the poor rural population (Danguilan 1999; Hernandez 1979). Magsaysay's successes in overcoming the Huk rebellion made him so popular that he won the presidency in 1953. Under his leadership, the Philippines experienced their 'golden years', domestically stable and internationally seen as a model for a young democracy and developing economy. But Magsaysay's death in a plane crash in 1957 and the subsequent weak leadership of Presidents Garcia and Macapagal paved the way for the rise of political maverick Ferdinand Marcos, who ran the country from 1965 to 1986. Democratically elected at first, Marcos turned into a classic third-world dictator by the 1970s and used the military as a strategic partner to stabilize his regime.

But as Marcos utilized the military, he also became dependent on it. Confronted with two severe internal conflicts – the reinvigorated communist rebellion and the Moro insurgency in the Southern Philippines – Marcos had to make concessions to the AFP. The military thus became both Marcos's 'partner in national development' and the coercive implementer of martial law throughout the country. Assuming non-military functions in areas affected by the rebellions, the AFP oversaw development projects and in some cases supplanted the civilian government. The armed forces also gained supremacy over the suppression of dissent, making them 'the principal wielders of power over a highly personalized authoritarian regime' (Hernandez 1985b; Miranda 1992). Marcos rewarded the AFP with enlarged defense budgets – in 1975, the AFP had the highest budget among its Southeast Asian counterparts. Furthermore, the AFP expanded massively, swelling the number of regulars from 70,000 in 1973 to 275,000 by 1975 (Miranda 1985). While the AFP grew stronger, Marcos kept it under his control through his presidential powers of appointments and promotions. His employment of 'subjective civilian control' (Huntington 1957) frequently transgressed the formal chain of command by retaining loyal generals beyond the retirement age and favoring his own military cronies over more qualified officers. Similarly, Marcos appointed

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military loyalists to key civilian posts such as government-owned and controlled corporations (Hernandez 1979).

However, Marcos's approach of 'divide and rule' undermined the professionalism within the military and created discontent among junior officers and some senior generals. With Marcos's regime becoming increasingly criticized both internationally and at home, the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) – led by Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and the Vice Chief of Staff General Fidel V. Ramos – eventually broke away from the AFP chain of command and joined the rest of the anti-Marcos groups already protesting against the dictatorship (Hernandez 1985a). Beleaguered by mass protests and deserted by key generals, Marcos had no choice but to flee the country in 1986 and relinquish power to his nemesis, Corazon Aquino. While Marcos retired in Hawaii, he left the Philippines with weakened democratic institutions, a politicized military, and unresolved insurgencies.

It took the entirety of Aquino's term (1986–92) to return Philippine CMR to their pre-martial law state. Given the tremendous entanglement of the AFP with the Marcos dictatorship, it was imperative to clarify the roles of the military and to impose democratically legitimated civilian control. Most significantly, the adoption of the 1987 Constitution reasserted the supremacy of civilian authority over the military by re-establishing institutional oversight mechanisms over the AFP. These included legislative powers over the AFP budget as well as the confirmation of military appointments and promotion – a process in which the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (PCHR) was now also involved. Another important reform was the separation of the national police from the military.[4] The Philippine National Police (PNP) formally assumed the primary function of preserving internal security (which includes the suppression of insurgencies), leaving the AFP with the task of providing external defense (Hernandez and Ubarra 1999).[5] There was a loophole, however: the AFP continued to have a responsibility in situations of very serious threats to internal security. Therefore, the intensification of conflict between the government and both the communist insurgents and the Moro separatist movement prevented the immediate transfer of key functions from the military to the police (Arcala 2002).

Despite the general rolling back of military prerogatives, the volatile nature of the democratic transition made the Aquino administration vulnerable to pressure from the AFP. Hernandez (1997: 46–7), for example, observed the 'adoption of policies that enhanced military privileges such as increases in pay, the removal of cabinet officials perceived as left-leaning or hostile to the military, holding back on the prosecution of military officers and personnel accused of human rights violations, and the suppression of internal conflicts through a military-preferred approach.' In addition, Aquino was subjected to at least seven coup attempts by disgruntled junior officers, some of whom had backed the 1986 'People Power' revolt. But while opinion polls showed that there was widespread dissatisfaction with economic and political conditions under Aquino's rule, this did not translate into public support for political intervention by the military (Mangahas 1994). Hence, the coup attempts failed not only because of their amateurish execution,

but also because of the strong opposition by civil society. Moreover, the senior command remained loyal to the incumbent government and the US continued to support Aquino (Fact-Finding Commission 1990: 495).

As a result of the mutinies, in 1989 the Aquino administration commissioned an investigation headed by constitutional expert Hilario Davide on the obvious deficiencies in the AFP. Its report revealed the lingering internal problems of the armed forces: inadequate pay and benefits, lack of logistical support and services to soldiers in the field, favoritism in promotions, and prevalent corruption. The probe not only emphasized the importance of military reform, it also demanded good governance from the civilian political leadership, in both the political and economic arenas (Hernandez 1997). And while not much was done to implement the military reforms suggested by the Davide Commission, the post-Aquino period initially saw some significant improvements in the quality of governance. Under President Fidel Ramos (1992–8), the Philippine polity stabilized considerably, the economy grew strongly, and political conflict subsided. As a former general, Ramos commanded respect from the AFP, enabling him to prevent mutinies and bring the military on board on important policies, such as the government negotiations with the Moro rebels.[6] It was only after Ramos's replacement by movie star-turned-politician Joseph Estrada in 2001 that the wounds of the Philippines' weak polity were reopened and the military was dragged into the midst of political conflict once again.

The military's renaissance: AFP involvement in post-2001 politics

The 'critical juncture' in post-2001 CMR in the Philippines was the severe crisis of democratic institutions in late 2000 and early 2001. In October 2000, a notorious gambling racketeer and provincial governor publicly accused Estrada of receiving monthly 'shares' of proceeds from illegal gambling in exchange for protecting its continued operation nationwide. This became the last straw for civil society and the political opposition who launched a campaign for the president's resignation, impeachment, or ouster (Arugay 2004). However, the impeachment proceedings against Estrada in the Senate were obstructed by senators loyal to the president, causing massive public protests in the streets of Manila and other urban centers in the country. With the political situation deadlocked, the key to the resolution of the crisis was held by the AFP. Overwhelmed by the swelling popular protest, the armed forces ultimately decided to abandon Estrada and throw their support behind Vice President Gloria Arroyo. As a result, Estrada was forced to vacate the presidency in January 2001, and Arroyo swiftly (and controversially) took power. The crisis not only exposed the vulnerability of democratic institutions in the post-Marcos Philippines – it also gave the military a chance to demonstrate and increase its political role (Doronila 2001). To most observers at that time, it was already clear that the 2001 events would have far-reaching repercussions for the country's CMR (Hernandez 2001).

The military's decision to abandon its democratically elected commander-in-chief was unprecedented in Philippine political history. While the AFP justified

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its stance by invoking its constitutional duty as protector and defender of the state and its people, there was certainly more to this story. Civil society groups active during the anti-Estrada campaign as well as the members of the political opposition had been soliciting support from military groups since January 2000, when the first political scandals involving Estrada were exposed. Their approach was warmly received, pointing to ongoing tensions between Estrada and the AFP over a wide range of issues. This anti-Estrada sentiment in the military was also confirmed by developments after his fall, with the AFP showing remarkable determination in suppressing the mobilization of Estrada's supporters in May 2001. In that month, political allies and supporters of Estrada from the urban poor demonstrated against his arrest, threatening to destabilize Arroyo's young presidency. In response, Arroyo declared a 'state of rebellion' and ordered the military to quell the protest marches that reached the gates of the presidential palace (Arugay and Curato 2010). Quite obviously, the AFP's senior leadership had a very different attitude to popular protest against Arroyo than it had to civil society opposition against Estrada: while it used the latter to justify the president's removal, it seemed resolved to protect Arroyo's presidency at all cost.

The 2003 mutiny: a catalyst for military reform

While Arroyo certainly had the support of most of the top generals of the AFP, there was considerable discontent in the lower ranks. On 27 July 2003, a group of more than 300 junior officers and enlisted personnel occupied the Oakwood Premier Ayala Center, a serviced apartment complex near Makati City, the country's business and financial district. In what became known as the Oakwood mutiny, the rebels – who called themselves the Magdalo group[7] – highlighted a long list of grievances over internal AFP problems, but also demanded the resignation of the incumbent president. The later findings of the Feliciano Commission[8] – an investigative body appointed by the Arroyo administration – revealed that the group, which had the support of civilian politicians, intended to reinstall former President Estrada for a few days and then replace him with a civil–military junta. That junta was then supposed to implement the so-called National Moral Recovery Program, a set of objectives chiefly crafted by former putschist and senator Gregorio Honasan (Fact-Finding Commission 2003).[9] However, the mutineers surrendered after 18 hours without any of their demands having been met.

The Oakwood mutiny exposed the fact that not much had been achieved in terms of structural military reforms since the coups against Aquino in the late 1980s. On the one hand, post-Marcos governments had not made significant progress in addressing the widespread corruption in the military and government, the low payment and insufficient equipment of soldiers in combat, and the rampant favoritism and politicization in the AFP. On the other hand, the reform proposals made in the 1990 report of the Davide Commission regarding the strengthening of civilian oversight institutions had also been largely ignored. Clearly, the Oakwood mutineers felt that they could launch their actions without serious personal consequences, given the lack of accountability and the disregard for the enforcement of

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the law against instigators of previous military coups during the Aquino administration (Hernandez 2007). But while Arroyo continued the long-standing tradition of 'soft' treatment of mutineers (some were detained, dishonorably discharged, and later pardoned), she also understood that she had to take action on some of the most pressing internal AFP problems if she wanted to prevent further uprisings in the armed forces (Arugay 2008a).

Hence, in order to address the legitimate grievances of AFP soldiers, Arroyo was quick to implement certain recommendations of the Feliciano Commission. Among the primary steps was the creation of new positions, such as that of an Undersecretary for Internal Control at the Department of National Defense (DND) and that of a special presidential adviser responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Commission's recommendations. In addition, Arroyo also appointed a civilian defense secretary – a position traditionally held by retired security personnel. There was surprisingly swift and decisive action from these institutions, resulting in the improvement of the remuneration packages for officers and enlisted personnel of the AFP. Moreover, the AFP was also ordered to ensure that soldiers were able to have access to housing, logistics, and necessary equipment. Finally, the AFP's cooperation with the judiciary and the Office of the Ombudsman led to the prosecution of several officials for corruption (Hernandez 2005: 3–4).

In order to be truly successful, however, military reform requires the involvement of other political actors such as the legislature as well as political parties, the media, and civil society organizations. This involvement was missing in the post-Oakwood reforms, with parliament failing to pass the laws necessary to institutionalize the planned changes. In addition, there was very little action taken to create an internal AFP mechanism for lower-ranking soldiers to express future grievances. Orthodox thinking within the AFP deemed that such a measure would corrode the chain of command and therefore the unity of the corps. Most importantly, however, the government gradually lost interest in genuine military reform as President Arroyo's political position weakened and she increasingly had to rely on support from the AFP. Arroyo's appointment of a retired general as defense secretary in February 2007 – an act that rolled back one of the main post-Oakwood reforms – symbolized the end of the civilian government's short-lived attempt to achieve a democratic transformation of CMR in the Philippines. Instead, both Arroyo and the AFP became more and more entangled in the country's escalating political conflicts.

The role of the military in the 2004 presidential elections

The 2004 presidential elections constituted an important watershed in CMR under the Arroyo administration. Prior to these elections, Arroyo had at least tried to implement some reforms, inspired by the Feliciano report. But the elections created an environment in which Arroyo began to subordinate the need for democratic CMR to the urgency of gaining the AFP's political support. Arroyo's controversial candidacy in 2004 marked the first run for re-election by a Philippine president since Marcos successfully did so in 1969.[10] Facing a tough challenge

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from Fernando Poe Jr., a popular movie actor and close friend of Estrada, Arroyo mobilized all her elite connections to secure victory (Hutchcroft 2008). State institutions, economic cronies, the election commission, and the security forces – all came under pressure from the palace to help Arroyo in her campaign. For Arroyo, winning the elections was not only about staying in office, but also about resolving all remaining doubts over her disputed ascent to the presidency in 2001.

While Arroyo officially won the polls with a margin of over one million votes, allegations of electoral fraud emerged slowly but steadily. In June 2005, tapes of a phone conversation between Arroyo and then Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano were leaked to the public. In these tapes, Arroyo was heard requesting a final margin of at least one million votes, which Garcillano appeared to agree to. As a result of the leaks, Arroyo faced impeachment proceedings in Congress, convincing her to move closer to the AFP for political protection. However, the military was not only closing ranks with Arroyo as a consequence of the president's advances – the armed forces were themselves accused of electoral manipulations. As Arugay and Curato (2010: 21) have stated, 'While the misconduct of some military personnel has been a staple feature of Philippine elections, the 2004 [election] was unique in the sense that it did not just involve discreet maneuvers from the military top brass or officers moonlighting as mercenaries and private security to local candidates.' Rather, 'the 2004 polls mobilized entire military units such as the Philippine Marines as agents of electoral fraud, which, according to several senior officers, even Marcos did not dare to do.'[11]

With the AFP's intervention in the 2004 elections going way beyond its normal provision of security in habitually violent polls (Linantud 1998; Patiño and Velasco 2003; Sidel 1999; Tuazon 2006), the military had clearly entered partisan political territory. Tying its fate to that of Arroyo, the military had once again become the instrument of a civilian president in need of political support. Not since Marcos had the AFP been so closely associated with an unpopular regime, forcing it into a defensive position *vis-à-vis* civil society and the media. But the commitment to Arroyo did not come without its benefits for the AFP's senior leadership: the president rewarded loyal generals with promotions and other favors. Most importantly, Arroyo gave the AFP high levels of autonomy in managing its own affairs. Particularly in the fight against the communist rebellion and the Moro insurgents, Arroyo left strategy and tactics to the military, which was also free to spend its budget as it deemed fit. In return, the military secured electoral support for Arroyo and her allies in Mindanao – the center of the alleged manipulations in the 2004 polls.

Arroyo's generals were also pleased that the government abandoned most of the post-Oakwood military reforms. In the eyes of the AFP leadership, the recommendations of the Feliciano Commission had been excessive and threatened to undermine the military's authority over its internal affairs. Not surprisingly, however, the freezing of the reform agenda angered the lower ranks, with the swelling dissatisfaction eventually erupting into two other attempts to remove President Arroyo. The stand-off launched by the Philippine Marines in 2006 and the siege of another hotel in Makati City in 2007 highlighted the deep

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involvement of the military in the Philippine's fractious politics: while the AFP's senior leadership stood loyally at Arroyo's side, the mutineers were supported by the president's political opponents (Arugay and Curato 2010). Consisting of civil society figures and politicians who had formerly supported Arroyo in 2001 but had since turned against her, the opposition had repeatedly failed in its campaigns to impeach the president in Congress. Subsequently, it solicited support from dissatisfied AFP elements in its cause to oust the chief executive. However, both the 2006 and 2007 incidents failed to mobilize enough public support to reproduce the 1986 and 2001 uprisings against unpopular governments. Nevertheless, the events demonstrated once more the 'contribution' of rival political camps to the politicization of the military: as one party (the president) needed the AFP to stay in power, the other (the opposition) wanted factions in the military to help delegitimize the incumbent and thus work towards her replacement.

Oversight overlooked: the continued erosion of civilian oversight

The extreme politicization of the AFP under Arroyo has further weakened the civilian institutions in charge of overseeing the military. The norm of democratic civilian control dictates that the boundaries between 'civilian' and 'military' spheres are clear and that the jurisdiction of oversight institutions is respected by the military (Pion-Berlin 2009; Trinkunas 2005). However, with the armed forces under Arroyo effectively operating as part of the regime, the distinctions between principal and agent of oversight became blurred. One indication of this trend has been the appointment of retired military officials to positions in the civilian bureaucracy (Gloria 2003). While Arroyo had initially appointed a civilian as defense secretary after the Oakwood affair, she again named a retired security officer to the position in early 2007.[12] In addition, retired officers have been assigned to other bodies that are formally responsible for holding the military accountable. This lack of institutional independence has jeopardized any prospect of genuine oversight as the loyalty of retired officers to their former institutions (i.e., the military and police) generally prevents them from taking action against the bodies they have been asked to oversee. Moreover, the situation is somewhat similar in the legislative branch of government. Retired military officials who became members of Congress have almost automatically been assigned to chair legislative committees empowered to confirm military appointments, approve defense budgets, and conduct investigatory hearings on military matters.[13]

The appointment of military loyalists to key positions in the bureaucracy and the AFP itself was part of Arroyo's 'subjective civilian control' of the armed forces. Like in Huntington's model, Arroyo exercised oversight not in order to establish effective accountability mechanisms, but to preserve her own regime. This pattern was also reflected in what was known as the 'revolving door' policy in the AFP. Arroyo had to reward so many loyalists with positions that she appointed 12 generals as AFP chief of staff (CSAFP) in her 9 years of office (Arugay and Curato 2010). Considered the top achievement in a soldier's career, this prestigious post had to be 'shared' among the many generals who not only

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supported Arroyo's ascent to the presidency but also kept her in power. With such a short term as CSAFP, most generals were not able to perform their functions, develop a long-term vision for the Philippine military, or check the performance of other officials. As a result, lower-ranking officers felt free of any meaningful scrutiny. For instance, the son of AFP Deputy Chief of Staff for Comptrollership, Major General Carlos F. Garcia, was intercepted with a huge amount of cash at a US airport in December 2003. Instead of taking decisive action, the then CSAFP simply moved Garcia to a less 'lucrative' position; he was only prosecuted for plunder after his retirement (Gloria and Martin 2004).

With Arroyo concentrating on regime maintenance, improving institutional civilian oversight systems was not a priority for her government. This lack of interest was particularly evident in the absence of references to civilian oversight in the US-sponsored Philippine Defense Reform Program (PDRP). In place since 2003, the PDRP has focused on increasing the operational effectiveness of the AFP, such as defense planning systems, training capacity, logistics provision, staff development, personnel management, financial controls, and strategic communications (Arugay 2010). Without participation from other state agencies or members of the non-governmental security community, the PDRP has failed to develop a comprehensive and holistic approach to improving the country's security and defense capabilities. It has been silent on reform measures such as increasing the power of civilian oversight institutions, as this could generate discomfort among officials of the defense department and AFP. However, while the PDRP pointed to weak domestic interest in strong civilian oversight, it also highlighted less-than-enthusiastic support for such notions from the US, the Philippines' partner in the program. Preoccupied with the War on Terror and terrorist training camps in Mindanao, the US apparently put more emphasis on developing classic military capacities than on championing democratic oversight.

The institutional weaknesses of civilian oversight bodies have been compellingly exposed in a 2009 study on the state of security sector governance in the Philippines (ISDS 2009). The report demonstrated that while most institutions have been empowered by law to perform an oversight mandate, the lack of resources, leadership, and coordination have prevented these bodies from keeping the military in check. For example, legislative committees have lacked the necessary human, technical, and financial resources to scrutinize budgets, review the implementation of security policy, and audit military spending. Significantly, where oversight functions have been exercised, they have often been abused. Members of the Philippine Congress, for their part, have misused the confirmation of military appointments and other congressional hearings to pursue their own vested interests and develop a media profile.[14] As a result, the discussions between summoned AFP officials and legislators have often been unfocused. Finally, the lack of leadership has resulted in poor coordination among oversight institutions and therefore ineffective performance. For instance, every military official up for promotion or an appointment to a major position requires a statement from the PCHR that clears the applicant from possible cases or complaints regarding human rights violations. The study found, however, that almost all candidates have been

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automatically cleared, since the PCHR has received very little information from other government agencies and the military. Consequently, a potentially powerful oversight function has been undermined by the (arguably deliberate) lack of inter-agency cooperation.

Counterinsurgency and human rights: the military as an instrument of terror

Quite naturally, the AFP's politicization under Arroyo was accompanied by a significant expansion of its role in exercising state coercion. Faced with weak governments that need to make concessions, militaries often ask for more influence over domestic security policies, particularly in unstable areas that require counterinsurgency operations (Alagappa 2001). While the Philippine military had always been the dominant actor in crafting and implementing counterinsurgency strategies, this had usually been balanced by the government's goal of achieving a political settlement with the communist New People's Army (NPA) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Despite considerable policy differences among post-Marcos administrations, there had been a general recognition that pursuing peace was preferable to gaining victory through a heavy-handed military approach (Hernandez 2005). However, this approach changed under the Arroyo administration as the military became increasingly influential and pushed for more aggressive counterinsurgency operations. To be sure, external factors contributed to this development. The CPP and its military wing, the NPA, have been included in the US government's list of foreign terrorist organizations, providing the AFP with justification and protection for its often brutal operations. Similarly, the links between the MILF and the Indonesia-based terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) (ICG 2004) allowed the AFP to sidestep the peace process and favor a more military-oriented approach. The AFP's actions against MILF and JI training camps in Mindanao were particularly appreciated in Washington, where they were seen as part of the global campaign against Islamist militancy and terror (Docena 2007).

With the AFP keen to crush rebels rather than negotiate with them, the civilian government did not hesitate to arm the military with the necessary legal framework. Euphemistically called the Human Security Act of 2007, the country's new anti-terrorism law empowered the military to carry out operations against suspected terrorist organizations and individuals. The Act further entrenched the AFP in internal security, marginalizing the police from the arena of counterinsurgency operations. Finally, it empowered the government to identify terrorist groups and define acts of terrorism. While the law explicitly stated that such definitions shall not 'prejudice respect for human rights', it left open whether civil liberties would still extend to those who have been classified by the government as committing acts of terrorism (Hilbay 2007). Even before this piece of legislation was passed, however, the Arroyo government and the AFP had already designed the so-called National Internal Security Plan (NISP). In place since 2001, it is in essence the government's ultimate strategy to defeat insurgency and armed challenges to the Philippine state. Theoretically, it promotes a comprehensive and

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holistic perspective, seeking to address security threats through the promotion of good governance, alleviation of poverty, peace advocacy, and combat operations. But in practice, the NISP has put strong emphasis on the military defeat of insurgent groups as a necessary precondition for the country to achieve peace and development (Esperon 2007).

The military component of the NISP – called *Bantay Laya* (Freedom Watch) – actively sought the assistance of state agencies, local government institutions, and even civil society organizations. This cooperation has indeed reduced insurgent activity in some communities, paving the way for economic development (Arugay 2008b). In some areas, the AFP itself implemented development-related projects through its National Development Support Command (NDSC) (Quilop 2010). However, these initiatives arguably have far-reaching repercussions on the quality of democratic civilian control. To begin with, the AFP has duplicated and even possibly usurped the responsibilities that are supposed to be performed by civilian executive agencies and local governments, such as the delivery of basic social services. Moreover, the NISP campaign also gave the military a free hand in organizing cooperatives and running lucrative micro-credit schemes (Abaya 2005), which can provide soldiers with a major source of off-budget revenue. Second, the NISP provided the military with a welcome justification for confronting long-standing AFP and Arroyo critics. Accusing some non-governmental organizations and even party-list legislators of linkages with the CPP and NPA, the military used the terrorism label to silence opponents of the incumbent regime. While the AFP failed to provide clear evidence for the alleged links with these communist groups, it was evident that the targeted organizations and individuals were vocal critics of the Arroyo administration and the military's approach to the communist insurgency. Allegations against these left-wing activists were disseminated not only to all military units, but also to government agencies and local communities.[15]

The stigmatization of the political left led to an enormous increase of human rights violations against its supporters in activist circles and the media. These violations included murders, attempted assassinations, and involuntary disappearances. The number of 'extra-judicial killings' reached a record high – 66 in 2005 and 70 in 2006. Based on a report commissioned by the US Agency for International Development, 221 of the 305 recorded cases of extra-judicial killings from 2001 to 2010 occurred during Arroyo's second term (Parreño 2010). Most importantly, the reports of a UN special rapporteur (Human Rights Watch 2007) and a fact-finding body formed by the government both concluded that the military was responsible for the great number of these incidents, saying that 'there is certainly evidence pointing the finger of suspicion at some elements and personalities in the armed forces … as responsible for an undetermined number of killings, by allowing, tolerating, and even encouraging the killings' (Melo Commission 2007: 50). Despite these findings, the military has categorically denied any involvement in this multitude of abuses, which reached a level unseen since the martial law era under Marcos. While the AFP argued that the executions were the by-product of internal purges within insurgent groups, credible international groups have

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repudiated this claim and expressed concern over the inability of the AFP and the Arroyo government to differentiate between insurgents, terrorists, and political dissidents (ICG 2008). The impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of the killings was a major factor in the downgrading of the Philippines from 'free' to 'partly free' in the 2007 Freedom House report, causing severe damage to the Philippines' international reputation (Puddington 2008).

Explaining military autonomy: the role of political conflict and institutions

The previous discussion has demonstrated that after 2001 the AFP expanded its influence and autonomy, challenging assessments that the military's political role has been in decline (Alagappa 2001). Indeed, the post-2001 period has seen the AFP exhibiting complex manifestations of political intervention that have seriously undermined the quality of Philippine democracy. This has been possible because civilian politicians and the military leadership have taken full advantage of the weak state of political institutions in the country for the pursuit of their own parochial interests. In turn, this weakness of institutions has been intertwined with severe political conflicts that undermined the Philippine political system and provided entry points for the armed forces to increase their influence. From the extra-constitutional removal of the president in 2001 and the continued fights over the legitimacy of the Arroyo administration to the ongoing communist insurgency and the conflicts in Mindanao – all these developments were in complex ways both the source and the consequence of weak institutions unable to regulate political conflict in an orderly manner.

Obviously, the weakness of political institutions has been part of the historical legacies that continue to weigh heavily on Philippine CMR (Hedman 2001; McCoy 1999). The US-style political system that was imposed on the Philippines in the first half of the 20th century has never really taken root in the country's fragmented society, with land-owning elites still maintaining their deeply entrenched power and wealth. Similarly, the blatant disregard on the part of the Marcos dictatorship for democratic institutions has made it much harder for strong institutional mechanisms to develop in the current polity. Of course, this legacy added to the fact that civilian institutions have always struggled to overcome the AFP's historically anchored self-perception as the protector and defender of the state and the people. However, while historical factors go a long way in accounting for the current state of CMR, its explanatory power has clear limitations. First, there are significant differences of opinion and behavior in both the armed forces and the political elite. Some elements in both groups have worked towards building and respecting strong institutions, proving that historical legacies do not preclude initiatives to overcome them. Second, and more importantly, there have been episodes in Philippine history in which even entire administrations were able to buck the trend and establish effective governance, including in CMR. In general, the government of Fidel Ramos was such an example, and – to a lesser extent – Arroyo's first three years in office as

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well. In other words, a fixation on historical legacies fails to explain fluctuations in the authority and behavior of institutions and individuals.

The 'rationalist' approach to explaining military interventionism and weak civilian institutions has similar limitations. While it is true that the military's influence in Philippine politics is often related to the pursuit of vested interests by the AFP and civilian actors (Feaver 2003), there are important caveats. For instance, as the many mutinies under Arroyo have shown, the military has rarely operated as a monolithic bloc. Instead, diverse factions in the military have pursued highly antagonistic interests, with one group supporting the very president that the other intended to remove. Similarly, civilian groups have harbored and pursued very different agendas. Some of these agendas were supportive of democratic CMR, while others openly aspired to undermine them. Accordingly, an explanatory model focused exclusively on the rational interests in the civil–military sector can capture some crucial insights, but is incapable of providing the full picture.

International factors, for their part, have not mattered as much as they used to. During the period of the Cold War, the military's role in politics had been encouraged by the US because of its strategic interests in the country and the region. However, the sea changes in the global and regional security environment after 1990 reduced the active interest of the US in Philippine military affairs. While the War on Terror then led to a certain reinvigoration in US–Philippine security relations (De Castro 2003), this has at best played a secondary and supporting role in pushing the military to get more politically involved after 2001. US military aid and assistance packages were increased to support the government's campaign against terrorism but they did not impact on the civil-military balance in the way domestic developments did. In the same vein, regional integration and its security infrastructures have not caused significant change in Philippine CMR, unlike in other parts of the world (Desch 1999). While democratic civilian control of the military has been promoted as a norm governing regional organizations in Latin America and Europe, such standards have not been established within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

It seems, then, that it was the quality of civilian governance and leadership that was most decisive in shaping Philippine CMR after 2001. While already established structures, vested interests, and international influences were certainly important in weakening the civilian institutions charged with military oversight, the increased AFP power in the post-2001 Philippines was not historically predetermined. Rather, the specific leadership styles of both Estrada and Arroyo created a governmental environment in which the traditional weaknesses of the Philippine political system were aggravated and allowed the military to expand its influence. Estrada, with his excessively corrupt lifestyle and disregard for proper institutional procedures, undermined the very democratic institutions that had helped him to gain power. By provoking his own downfall, he threw the Philippines into constitutional chaos, ending the period of relative stability begun under Fidel Ramos. Arroyo, while offering reasonably effective governance between 2001 and 2004, made the fateful decision to break her promise not to run for a second term. Once

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she had reached that decision, she made herself dependent on the AFP's ability to secure her electoral victory. With the manipulations in the polls subsequently exposed by the press, she had to rely even more on the AFP to escape demands for her impeachment. Stuck in a vicious cycle of having to make concessions to the AFP and trying to control it at the same time, Arroyo was unable to deliver effective governance.

Both Estrada and Arroyo were at the center of severe political conflicts of their own making, distracting them from building workable state institutions. Under their leadership, elite disputes escalated, the communist rebellion intensified, and the resolution of the Mindanao conflict moved out of reach. It should not come as a surprise that under such circumstances the military became increasingly powerful and autonomous. The aforementioned examples of the Magsaysay administration in the 1950s and the government of Fidel Ramos in the 1990s underline that such an outcome was not the result of inescapable structures and historical legacies; instead, it was the consequence of actions by highly polarizing political personalities who violated the democratic consensus and therefore needed the military to stay in power. Like Thaksin in Thailand, Estrada and Arroyo left deeply divided political landscapes that will need many years to reconcile. Against this background, it remains to be seen whether Benigno Aquino III, elected to the presidency in May 2010, will be able to re-stabilize the polity and consequently reduce the influence of the armed forces. However, his appointment of retired military officer and close Aquino family friend Voltaire Gazmin as secretary of defense has indicated that he still views close ties to the AFP as a necessary element of his administration. Naturally, Gazmin started his term with the marginalization of key officers appointed by Arroyo.

The failures of leadership under the Estrada and Arroyo administrations have had serious consequences for the institutional framework of security sector governance in the Philippines. With the military taking positions in and defining policies for the civilian bureaucracy, the demarcation line between control authorities and the armed forces became blurred. Similarly, as civilian politicians in the executive and legislature misused appointment and promotion powers as instruments in their competition for political power, the mechanisms designed to control the AFP became dysfunctional. Worse still, the political struggles over the Estrada and Arroyo presidencies also paralyzed the non-governmental security community, whose members were initially expected to play the role of the AFP's watchdog in the face of weakened state oversight mechanisms. Many of these civil society groups participated in the demonstrations against Estrada and Arroyo, and actively campaigned for their impeachment. The 2006 and 2007 mutinies against Arroyo were enthusiastically supported by civilian activists who opposed the president, pointing to the confusion among NGOs and think tanks about their mandate and mission. Obviously, the entirety of the Philippine CMR regime is in urgent need of a comprehensive overhaul – from presidential control mechanisms and legislative oversight to systems of societal scrutiny of the AFP. With the chaotic years of the Estrada and Arroyo presidencies finally over, there is at least some hope that this task can now be addressed more effectively.

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Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how the military has become a more politicized and autonomous actor after 2001. The return to formal democratic rule in 1986 prevented neither the AFP's gradual acquisition of non-traditional roles nor its rise as significant veto holder in the Philippine political system. This process has been facilitated by the absence of strong institutions that could perform civilian oversight, the political elite's disrespect for democratic institutions and the rule of law, and widespread societal ignorance over the appropriate role of the military in a functioning democracy. Thus, despite the widespread hopes for democratic reform of the armed forces after the events of 1986, long-term continuity rather than change has been the defining feature of the post-Marcos CMR.

The starting point for the military's renewed political strength was the 2001 impeachment of Joseph Estrada (Hernandez 2001). By withdrawing its loyalty from a popularly elected chief executive at the height of a constitutional crisis, the military played an important role in determining the outcome of a major political power struggle. Arroyo, as the beneficiary of the military's decision, paid a high price for her ascent to the presidency. Vulnerable to constant questions about her legitimacy, she formed an alliance with the military that constrained her ability to push for reforms in security sector governance. While she briefly tried to make some institutional changes after the 2003 Oakwood mutiny, her decision to contest the 2004 elections forced her to rely on the armed forces to secure her electoral victory. The AFP allegedly helped to deliver this 'triumph' at the ballot box through massive interventions and open manipulations, particularly in Mindanao. Subsequently, the impeachment campaigns against Arroyo glued the president ever more tightly to the armed forces as her only remaining source of real power.

Under incessant political siege, the Arroyo government allowed the military to expand its political prerogatives and even acquire new ones. This chapter has demonstrated how the AFP has pushed for an aggressive strategy to defeat insurgent movements, jeopardizing the peace process traditionally favored by successive civilian governments. With the new approach producing few measurable results, however, the communist rebellion and the Moro insurgency actually intensified, forcing the Arroyo administration to provide the military with even more resources to counter the growing threat. Furthermore, the use of extrajudicial killings and other terror tactics to stifle dissent from leftist groups exposed the military's belief that it now also possessed the exclusive right to judge the appropriateness of expressions of political discontent. Both domestically and internationally, the civilian government's lack of action in demanding accountability from the perpetrators of these large-scale killings provided compelling evidence of the military's expanded political autonomy (Parreño 2010).

Like many other countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines face the tremendous challenge of establishing more modern, transparent, and accountable systems of security sector governance (Ball and Brzoska 2002; Beeson *et al.* 2006). Having won the largest percentage of votes in a presidential election since the Marcos years, Benigno Aquino III has a strong mandate to carry out reforms and build

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more effective institutions of governance. However, exercising oversight of the military is not only a task for the civilian government. The AFP, the legislature, and civil society need to participate in this effort as well. Both the armed forces and civilian groups have to understand that the military is an indispensable tool of democratically elected governments to address defense and security threats, and not an instrument to maintain power and confront political opponents. For this understanding to take root, new paradigms of democratic CMR need to be propagated and entrenched through workable institutions. Accomplishing this goal in the coming years will be a formidable, but not impossible task.

Notes

1 This chapter defines political autonomy as 'the military's aversion towards or even defiance of civilian control. The degree of political autonomy is a measure of the military's determination to strip civilians of their political prerogatives and claim these for itself' (Pion-Berlin 1992: 85). High degrees of autonomy in these spheres imply the weakness of the civilian government, its inability to assert civilian control, or its failure to be independent from partisan interests.
2 Ideologically, however, the AFP traces its origins to the fight against the Spanish colonial power in the 1890s.
3 Originally a peasant movement, the *Hukbalahap* (People's Army Against the Japanese) was a group of guerrillas that fought the Japanese invaders but subsequently took up arms against the government because of their exclusion from the post-war political order (Kerkvliet 1977).
4 This separation required the abolition of the Philippine Constabulary.
5 The plan was that the AFP would maintain a role in counterinsurgency operations until the police acquired the necessary training and resources to assume sole responsibility.
6 This was made possible because of the policy of unconditional amnesty implemented by Ramos to all those who committed acts of rebellion. To a certain extent, Ramos was instrumental in cultivating the culture of impunity since coup makers and plotters never faced accountability for their actions.
7 This was the name of a faction under the *Katipunan*, a revolutionary society under Spanish colonial rule headed by General Emilio Aguinaldo.
8 The Commission was headed by former Supreme Court Justice Florentino Feliciano, and had academics, jurists, and military officials as members.
9 In their testimony, the leaders of the Magdalo group insisted that the mutiny was spontaneous. However, this was disputed by the fact-finding body (Fact-Finding Commission 2003).
10 According to the 1987 Philippine Constitution, a president is only allowed to serve a single term of six years and is not allowed to run for re-election.
11 In January 2006, the AFP commissioned an internal body to investigate these allegations. Its full report remains a classified document but it apparently absolved several generals from any misconduct in the 2004 elections.
12 For more details, see http://www.pcij.org/blog/?p=1443 and http://www.gmanews.tv/story/77716/Military-and-police-appointees-to-civilian-government-posts
13 Some scholars have argued that retired military officials should be considered as civilians given that they are no longer in active service. Others, however, have disputed this, saying that military training inevitably produces a 'military mind' (Huntington 1957). In the Philippine context, this military mindset is further entrenched by the specific socialization of AFP members as well as the social networks they form and interact with (McCoy 1999). These vital features do not disappear or become irrelevant

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once officers retire from active service. The author is grateful to Carolina G. Hernandez for this insight.

14 This led President Arroyo to sign Executive Order 464 in September 2005, which prevented officials from the executive branch from appearing before congressional hearings. It was rescinded two years later after an intervention of the Supreme Court that declared some of its provisions unconstitutional.

15 'Palace Document Shows Gov't Plan to Neutralize Left', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 16 July 2007.

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6 The armed forces in Timor-Leste

Politicization through elite conflict

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On 30 August 1999, the people of East Timor voted overwhelmingly to reject Indonesia's offer of broad autonomy, thereby bringing an end to 24 years of brutal military occupation. Over the next two years, the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) was mandated to restore order, maintain security, and oversee the transition to independence. Under UNTAET, new state institutions were established, including a defense force (Falintil-Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste, F-FDTL), and a national police (Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste, PNTL). But despite the optimism within East Timorese society and among international actors when sovereignty was transferred to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in May 2002, the security sector remained grossly under-regulated and politically sensitive. In the immediate post-independence period, the security sector was plagued by internal problems as well as by a number of overlapping political cleavages and social tensions. These intra-civilian conflicts included increasing friction between then President José Alexandre 'Xanana' Gusmão and Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri and his party, Fretilin; the impotence of opposition parties in the face of Fretilin political control; debates over the direction and pace of economic development; and security concerns related to both pro-Jakarta militias in Indonesian West Timor and domestic groups which rejected Fretilin's legitimacy.

It was in this context that demonstrations by members of F-FDTL over discrimination within the army and the subsequent dismissal of nearly 600 soldiers snowballed into anti-government demonstrations and violence in the capital in 2006. This, in turn, triggered a series of armed clashes – between army units, between civilians and the army, and between the army and the police – and culminated in communal violence framed in terms of the dichotomy between easterners (*firaku*) and westerners (*kaladi*) within the East Timorese nation. Despite the deployment of Australian troops, Alkatiri's forced resignation, and the establishment of a new UN mission, the security sector remained volatile. Significantly, UN recommendations for the prosecution of individuals who had committed crimes during the 2006 violence were largely ignored. The fate of soldiers dismissed from F-FDTL was left unresolved; renegade former Military Police Commander Major Alfredo Reinado remained on the loose; and at least one tenth of the population continued to be displaced from their homes. Even with the 2007 election of José

Ramos-Horta to the presidency and the formation of a new coalition government headed by Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, the urgency of security sector reform was dulled by the presence of the UN and severely constrained by fractures within the governing coalition, Fretilin opposition, and F-FDTL intransigence. In early 2008, this minefield of overlapping issues triggered an unsuccessful assassination attempt against President Ramos-Horta and the declaration of a state of siege that lasted for four months.

Previous accounts of civil–military relations and the prolonged crisis in Timor-Leste have highlighted historical fissures within the resistance, the poorly conceived transformation of the armed resistance into F-FDTL, the absence of an adequate policy framework, and low levels of professionalism within F-FDTL and PNTL (Rees 2004; ICG 2006). In this chapter, by contrast, I will argue that it was to a large extent conflict between East Timor's key political actors that dragged the military into the political arena and undermined three core features of military professionalism – expertise in the management of violence, corporate unity, and responsibility to the client. The chapter develops its arguments in six narrative and analytical steps. The first and second sections describe changing civil–military relations within the resistance during the Indonesian occupation and the establishment of Timor-Leste's new security forces between 1999 and 2002. Subsequently, the third and fourth sections examine the relationship between the security forces and both state and societal actors. In the fifth section, I consider the 2006–7 crisis and the half-hearted efforts by the new government to address security threats and reform the security sector. Finally, the conclusion discusses several explanatory propositions about civil–military relations in Timor-Leste and pinpoints the main reasons for their continued volatility.

Historical background

Civil–military relations in Timor-Leste since 2002 cannot be understood without reference to the aborted decolonization from Portugal in 1974–5 and the 24-year struggle against Indonesian occupation. Of particular importance are changing relations between Fretilin and its own armed forces during the 1970s, the role of leftist ideology during the early 1980s, and the subsequent personalization of leadership.

In April 1974, the left-leaning Armed Forces Movement overthrew the *Estado Novo* (New State) regime in Portugal and set in motion a hasty but poorly conceived decolonization process in Portugal's far-flung empire. In Portuguese Timor, members of the educated elite rushed to form political parties. With the backing of the police force, the pro-Portuguese Timorese Democratic Union (*União Democratic Timorense*, UDT) launched an 'anti-communist movement' on 11 August 1975 against the pro-independence Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of East Timor (*Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente*, Fretilin). In response, Fretilin rallied support from within the Portuguese colonial military, under the leadership of Rogerio Lobato, and on 20 August these troops were renamed the Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor (*Forças*

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Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste, Falintil). Fretilin and its newly christened military launched a counter-attack against UDT, quickly winning control of the capital Dili and forcing tens of thousands of UDT supporters across the border into Indonesian West Timor. The Portuguese administration fled, leaving Fretilin as the *de facto* government, and on 28 November Fretilin President Francisco Xavier do Amaral declared independence.

Reflecting the revolutionary models from Africa on which Fretilin leaders drew, relations between Fretilin and Falintil during the second half of 1975 were characterized by 'subjective control' over the armed forces, meaning that Falintil was determined to uphold the supremacy of the party over its fighters (Alagappa 2001: 41). Fretilin appointed political commissars to oversee the military and ensure its adherence to party policy. Despite this approach, tensions emerged between Fretilin and Falintil over the party's ideology and the use of violence against political enemies. In the midst of these internal disputes, the Indonesian military (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*, ABRI) launched a full-scale invasion of Portuguese Timor on 7 December 1975. Forced to retreat from the cities, Fretilin established base areas (*base de apoio*) in the mountainous interior and waged a remarkably successful war against the superior Indonesian forces for three years. Despite the continued policy of political supremacy over the military, the war exacerbated tensions between Fretilin and Falintil. Party leaders sought to address this by appointing military officers to the Fretilin Central Committee (Gusmão 2000: 42); on the other hand, officers who rejected Fretilin policy were arrested, purged, and in some cases executed. But with the fall of the last base areas in late 1978, resistance to the Indonesian occupation was reduced to small, dispersed groups isolated from the civilian population. The leadership of both the party and the military was decimated.

Having lost its territorial bases, without international borders behind which to hide, and with no hope of outside assistance, the party leadership needed to reassess its situation and strategy. In March 1981, a National Reorganization Conference was held near Lacluta at which Xanana Gusmão, one of the few surviving Fretilin Central Committee members, served as conference president, was elected national political commissar, and was reconfirmed as commander-in-chief of Falintil. Resolutions were passed changing the name of the party from Fretilin to *Partido Marxista-Leninista Fretilin* (MLF) and establishing the Revolutionary Council of National Resistance (*Conselho Revolucionária de Resistência Nacional*, CRRN), intended to oversee relations between the party, the guerrilla forces, and the civilian front (RDTL/Fretilin 1981: 32-3).[1] Ideologically, the adoption of Marxism-Leninism provided a common set of analytical tools and reasserted the supremacy of the party over the armed forces, both of which were necessary to overcome the internal divisions that had fractured the resistance during the 1970s (Kammen 2009).

Despite the organizational initiatives adopted in 1981, ABRI offensives hindered resistance efforts to consolidate forces and establish links to the civilian population under Indonesian control. An opening emerged in early 1983 when a series of low-level meetings between the resistance and ABRI officers culminated in a

meeting between Gusmão and the ABRI commander of East Timor at which they agreed to a temporary ceasefire. In August, however, the ceasefire was broken and ABRI launched a major new offensive. In the following year, differences erupted between Gusmão and the Falintil General Staff over ideology and military strategy. Gusmão emerged victorious from this struggle and thereafter remained the unchallenged leader of the civilian and military resistance (Rees 2004: 41–3). In an effort to broaden the resistance, Gusmão resigned from Fretilin in 1987, transformed CRRN into the National Council of Maubere Resistance (*Conselho Nacional de Resistência Maubere*, CNRM), and turned Falintil from being Fretilin-dominated into a non-partisan force. Although armed resistance continued to be symbolically important, greater emphasis was placed on clandestine activity and civilian protest. In 1992, Gusmão was captured and imprisoned in Jakarta. Nevertheless, he remained commander-in-chief of Falintil, retained control over Falintil appointments, and continued to direct strategy from his jail cell.

The resignation of Indonesian President Suharto in May 1998 triggered an outpouring of pro-independence activity in East Timor. Suharto's successor, President Habibie, first made an offer of 'broad autonomy' to East Timor, followed by an announcement in early 1999 that he would allow the people of East Timor to vote on their future. In May 1999, Indonesia, Portugal, and the UN reached an agreement to hold a referendum. In accordance with the agreement, Falintil troops were cantoned in several locations. Gusmão and Falintil Chief of Staff Taur Matan Ruak issued orders not to carry out attacks or defend the population from the Indonesian military and pro-Jakarta militias. Despite the widespread terror and violence perpetrated by pro-Indonesia militias during 1999, Falintil respected the cantonment. When the referendum was eventually held on 30 August, a vast majority of East Timorese voted against Jakarta's offer of broad autonomy. This outcome, in turn, triggered a campaign of violence, destruction, and mass displacement by the Indonesian military and its proxies.

The formation of F-FDTL

Following the referendum, UNTAET and the National Council for Timorese Resistance (*Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense*, CNRT)[2] held discussions about the transition to independence, including security arrangements for the new state. UN Security Council Resolution 1264 called for disarming all 'armed groups' in East Timor, but did not specify the status of Falintil. Upon arrival in late September, the International Force for East Timor (Interfet) sought to apply this mandate to both Falintil and the pro-Jakarta militias, despite the fact that Falintil was generally viewed as an army of national liberation and remained within the cantonments. Falintil leaders refused, and Interfet was forced to back down. In October 1999, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called for the establishment of an East Timorese police service and assigned observers to monitor Falintil, but there was no mention of creating a defense force. Annan's silence on this matter was understandable. Prior to the referendum, CNRT leaders had agreed that an independent East Timor would not need a traditional military, but instead could

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rely on a paramilitary police force. However, the Indonesian military and militia destruction in September, concern about refugees, and the threat of militia incursions convinced East Timorese leaders to rethink their position (Rees 2002: 156).

While the future of Falintil remained uncertain, in March 2000 UNTAET established the East Timor National Police (PNTL) and opened a police academy to train new recruits (Human Rights Watch 2006). The recruitment process was overseen by UN police based on international criteria, but 'there was no consideration of whether the candidate had been pro-autonomy or pro-independence, which generated protests from parts of East Timorese civil society' (La'o Hamutuk 2003: 2). Particularly controversial was the selection of 370 individuals who had served in the Indonesian police force – the very institution many East Timorese associated with Jakarta's brutal occupation. There was also concern that many of the new PNTL senior officers, including Commissioner Paulo Martins, were from the western districts, creating a regional imbalance (ICG 2008: 4). This alleged bias in PNTL's recruitment process became a central grievance of Falintil and clandestine veterans in the following years.

As the police force was being established, UNTAET set up a study group in early 2000 to consider the future of Falintil. Shortly afterwards, the Centre for Defence Studies at King's College, London, was commissioned to prepare a report on security force options. The terms of reference included the strategic environment, current security arrangements, analysis of Falintil, future defense policy, civil–military relations, defense force options, disaster relief, military–police relations, and the judiciary. The King's College report outlined three defense force options. The first option was for a force of 3,000–5,000 personnel (created around a core of 1,500 former Falintil guerrillas, with the remainder being new conscripts), including a riot control unit and small naval and air force branches. The second option was for a force of 3,000 (of which 800–1,000 would be former guerrillas and the remainder conscripts), and no riot control unit, navy, or air force. The third option called for a light infantry force of 3,000 (comprised of 1,500 regulars and 1,500 'volunteer reservists') without naval or air force components (CDS 2000: 47–56; Ball 2002). A modified version of the third option won out, largely for financial reasons, and in September 2000 UNTAET approved the creation of the East Timor Defense Force (*Força de Defesa de Timor-Leste*, FDTL).

From the outset, the transformation of Falintil into FDTL was politicized and plagued by controversy. Finding a name for the new defense force proved particularly difficult. The initial decision to adopt the name FDTL reflected a political desire on the part of Xanana Gusmão, members of the political elite from outside Fretilin, and the UN to disassociate FDTL from Falintil, which – despite Gusmão's moves in the 1980s – remained linked to Fretilin in the popular imagination. However, the Fretilin-controlled Constituent Assembly responded by including a provision in the constitution changing the name of FDTL to Falintil-East Timor Defense Force, or F-FDTL, in May 2002. While this was primarily intended to appease protest from those who viewed the retirement of Falintil as treason, some argued that the name change also aimed to reassert the historic connection between Fretilin and the defense force. A second problem involved defining who could be

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classified as a Falintil member. In addition to the 1,500 Falintil members cantoned in Aileu (a small town south of Dili), there were also veterans who had surrendered or been captured during the occupation as well as 'civilian' members of the clandestine networks that assisted Falintil during the 1980s and 1990s. A third issue stemmed from the decision to allow the Falintil elite full authority over the recruitment process. Of the 1,736 former Falintil members who applied to join the armed forces, only 650 were selected for the first battalion. Most significantly, the selection was heavily biased in favor of Falintil commanders loyal to Xanana Gusmão and individuals from the eastern districts.

Thus, when FDTL was established in February 2001, it consisted of a single battalion. It was only in July 2002 that a second battalion was formed, made up entirely of non-Falintil recruits. This brought the total force strength to 1,500. However, even those who were accepted into the new army faced problems: salaries were abysmally low (starting at US$ 85 per month), resentment surfaced over regional bias in ranks and promotions, and there were frequent complaints that the foreign instructors were patronizing and grossly over-paid in comparison with the East Timorese they were training.

As a result of the politically and regionally biased recruitment policy, 850 former Falintil fighters who had been in the Aileu cantonment were excluded from the new army. Various solutions were sought to ensure the reintegration of these and other veterans into their communities and provide them with employment. Two veterans' organizations were established, with President Gusmão also forming two special commissions to compile information on all former combatants (deceased and alive) and to appraise the needs of veterans. The issue of veterans was exacerbated, however, by the maneuvers of Rogerio Lobato, the brother of former Fretilin President Nicolao Lobato. In 1975, Rogerio Lobato had been a lieutenant in the Portuguese army and had served as minister of defense in the short-lived cabinet of the Democratic Republic of East Timor. He left East Timor before the Indonesian invasion and remained overseas throughout the occupation. Excluded from the transitional government and without a strong base within East Timor, in late 2001 he began to mobilize disgruntled Falintil veterans and unemployed youth. In the months leading up to the UN recognition of East Timor's independence, the paramilitary group *Força Base de Apoio* – which had informal links to Lobato – openly conducted training, much to the dismay of Dili residents and the UN.[3]

The security sector

After the official creation of the independent state of Timor-Leste in May 2002, national politics were colored by differences between Prime Minister Alkatiri and his party, Fretilin, on the one hand, and President Gusmão and the opposition parties on the other. While Gusmão was the nominal commander-in-chief of F-FDTL, he had few direct controls over the military aside from making top appointments. As prime minister, by contrast, Alkatiri had the authority to appoint a cabinet that included several long-time Fretilin Central Committee members from the diaspora: Rogerio Lobato was made minister of internal affairs, with

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responsibility for PNTL, and Roque Rodrigues was appointed secretary of state for defense. Importantly, the responsibility for security sector policy and budgeting rested solely with the Prime Minister and parliament.

While political infighting undermined coherent policy-making, the constitutional stipulations regarding oversight of the security sector were vague. Although the preamble to the constitution recognized the role of the 'glorious Falintil', its main text contained only a brief section on national defense and security. This simply stated that F-FDTL is responsible for military defense against 'aggression or external threat', that it shall be 'non-partisan', and 'not intervene in political matters' (RDTL 2002: 60). The constitution called for the establishment of a Council of State and a Superior Council for Defense and Security, but the necessary enabling legislation did not yet exist. Civilian oversight of F-FDTL rested solely with the embryonic secretariat of the defense secretary. The absence of legislation defining the respective roles of F-FDTL and PNTL also hindered the development of national security policy. Furthermore, even with the restoration of independence, the UN continued to 'provide interim law enforcement and public security' and 'contribute[d] to the maintenance of external and internal security in East Timor' until 2004 (La'o Hamutuk 2003). This ongoing presence of the UN, combined with poor relations between Gusmão and Alkatiri, meant that the security sector became what one author has aptly termed a 'policy free zone' (Rees 2004: 10–11).

Reflecting its small size, the F-FDTL adopted an extremely simple structure. Military headquarters were originally located in Metinaro, to the west of the capital, but later moved to Tacitolu, on the western outskirts of Dili. Currently, there are two infantry battalions, each with about 600 personnel. Battalion I – the one which had been recruited entirely from Falintil veterans – was based in Lospalos until it was moved to Baucau in 2006. Battalion II, made up of new recruits who were aged between 18 and 21 in 2001, remains based in Metinaro. F-FDTL also has a small naval unit and a military police force. Other than the broad statements in the constitution and a few other documents that highlight national defense and political neutrality, F-FDTL does not have a particular doctrine. The absence of a clear mission and identity was poignantly illustrated by graffiti that could be observed in front of the Battalion I base in Lospalos in 2003: 'F-FDTL is not the best, but it is different'. However, the most striking feature of F-FDTL was its regional fragmentation and imbalance: in 2001 easterners accounted for 56 percent of all personnel but made up 86 percent of the officer corps (ICG 2006: 6). This sociological divide was further reflected in the division between Battalion I, which was almost entirely comprised of easterners, and Battalion II, which was predominantly comprised of westerners.

While some militaries in young nations can strengthen their sense of mission by drawing from a compelling threat assessment, the F-FDTL was largely unable to do so. Threat assessments for Timor-Leste mostly reflected the violence in 1999 and strategic evaluations undertaken by the UN mission. Official UN statements repeatedly emphasized the threat posed by pro-Jakarta militias in West Timor. The most serious security threats, however, were not international but

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domestic, among which the unresolved issue of veterans was particularly volatile. Minister of Internal Affairs Rogerio Lobato sought to address this problem and concurrently increase his own influence by recruiting veterans and clandestine members into the national police force and civil service. But far from mitigating the tensions, Lobato's eagerness to recruit veterans and his decision to establish a separate directorate of civil security led to friction between himself and PNTL Commissioner Paulo Martins throughout the second half of 2002.

These conflicts precipitated a series of violent incidents in districts throughout Timor-Leste (including Baucau, Viqueque, Manufahi, Ermera, Covalima, Bobonaro, Liquica, and Dili) in late 2002 and early 2003. Two of these incidents are of particular importance for understanding the problems of Timor-Leste's emerging security sector. In December 2002, a demonstration by high school students was infiltrated by unidentified parties and resulted in rioting directed against foreign-owned businesses and the home of Prime Minister Alkatiri. Many, including President Gusmão, suspected that Minister of Internal Affairs Lobato had instigated the unrest. Although three separate investigations were launched, no findings were released. Another, similarly mysterious incident occurred in January 2003, when an armed group reportedly attacked villagers in Atsabe, Ermera District, killing seven people.[4] Dismayed by the failure of the UN Peace Keeping Force to take action, President Gusmão ordered F-FDTL to secure the area. At least 90 people were detained, and there were unconfirmed reports that the military used excessive force and committed human rights violations while making these arrests (Amnesty International 2003).

The Fretilin government sought to address the spate of security problems by establishing new special police units in May 2004. These included a border patrol unit, a rapid intervention unit in charge of civilian unrest in urban areas, and a police reserve unit intended for deployment in non-urban areas. Significantly, the scope of their responsibilities appeared to impinge on the constitutionally defined national defense role of F-FDTL, leading to tensions between the military and the police. The increase in police budgets and personnel greatly boosted the influence of the minister of internal affairs, at the expense of the already under-funded F-FDTL. In addition, Lobato's patronage of Falintil veterans from the western districts, many of whom were hostile to F-FDTL, was a clear affront to the overwhelmingly eastern-born F-FDTL officer corps. Finally, there was also a series of private altercations between F-FDTL and PNTL personnel.

Increasingly frustrated about Lobato's moves and the government's inability to solve the issue of trouble-making former combatants, senior F-FDTL officers made numerous public statements between 2002 and 2004 that aggravated the already tense situation. Among the most controversial of these was a comment in June 2003 by F-FDTL Chief of Staff Colonel Lere Anan Timor that if the problem of veterans was not addressed, he would resign from the military. One Dili newspaper quoted him as saying: 'If I resign I won't return my weapon to the government because I obtained it through the blood and the death of my friends in the struggle for East Timor's independence. If I leave [FDTL] I won't be alone, but will be with friends who used to lead troops and work together with the clandestine

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movement'.[5] These statements triggered heated public debate. Some viewed them as a sincere expression of concern, while others charged that they constituted insubordination and was a direct threat to democracy.

In sum, between 2002 and 2005 civil–military relations were plagued by problems stemming from the UN's phased handover of security responsibilities to the Timor-Leste government, tensions between the presidency and the cabinet, the lack of legislation and effective mechanisms for oversight of the security sector, institutional competition between F-FDTL and PNTL, grievances within F-FDTL, and ongoing unrest. Despite constant attempts to pull it into intra-civilian power struggles, however, the F-FDTL did not publicly interfere in the formulation of security policy or seek to expand its role in socio-economic affairs. As an institution, it did not engage in extra-constitutional operations, and there were no indications that the military or segments within it had designs on direct intervention in politics. Given that militaries that once played a strong role in wars of national liberation often seek political participation or even dominance in newly independent states, the political restraint shown by the F-FDTL was a remarkable phenomenon.

Political polarization

As the problems in establishing professional military and police forces remained unresolved, political tensions continued to increase. However, this conflict was no longer primarily defined by the personal rivalry between Prime Minister Alkatiri and President Xanana Gusmão as well as their respective camps. Instead, it had developed into a significant divide in political society as a whole. Frustrated by Fretilin's stranglehold over parliament, the major opposition parties leveled increasingly vocal accusations that Prime Minister Alkatiri was a communist and that the Fretilin government had authoritarian ambitions. In June 2005, the Catholic Church organized a 19-day demonstration against new legislation which stipulated that religious education was not mandatory in public schools. Opposition parties lent their support to the Church, which was viewed as a strategic ally against Fretilin. Following the Church demonstrations, the three major opposition parties – the Democratic Party (*Partido Democrático*, PD), the Social Democratic Party (*Partido Sosial Democrata*, PSD), and the Timorese Social Democratic Association (*Associação Social Democrática Timor,* ASDT) – announced plans to form a coalition. PSD and PD were strongest in Dili and the western-most districts, while ASDT was closely associated with Mambai speakers in the central highlands. During the second half of 2005, village-level elections were held across Timor-Leste, and Fretilin candidates fared poorly in the western districts. These results reinforced the impression that westerners supported the opposition to Alkatiri while easterners backed Fretilin. Moreover, the outcome was widely viewed as an important indicator of the national elections scheduled to be held in 2007.

This domestic political divide was mirrored in conflicts over Timor-Leste's foreign policy as well. Following independence, relations between the government

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of Timor-Leste and Australia were strained by contentious negotiations over oil in the Timor Sea and production sharing agreements, leading Australian Prime Minister John Howard to charge that the Alkatiri government was unappreciative of Australia's supportive role in 1999 and its subsequent aid contributions. At the same time, Timor-Leste's close relations with the People's Republic of China, which was providing significant aid, and Cuba, which was supporting the health sector by providing hundreds of doctors, was viewed by opposition parties and some foreign governments as further evidence that Alkatiri was a communist and that the government was becoming authoritarian.

In this situation, a loose alliance emerged between President Gusmão, the three major opposition parties, and the Catholic Church against Mari Alkatiri and Fretilin. The former was strongly associated with the western districts, the latter with the eastern districts; the former allied themselves with democratic governments in Europe, the United States, and Australia that were concerned about Timor-Leste's potential authoritarian tendencies, and the latter with former 'socialist bloc' countries seeking to expand their influence in the Asia-Pacific region. This polarization of national politics was to have a direct impact on the three core aspects of military professionalism – expertise in the management of violence, the corporate unity of the military, and its responsibility to the client (Huntington 1957).

To begin with, the F-FDTL's claim to superior expertise in the management of violence was challenged by the creation of special police units and, in 2004, the purchase of high-powered weapons for PNTL. The primary threat, however, did not come from PNTL per se but from Minister of Internal Affairs Rogerio Lobato. As he had done prior to independence, Lobato turned to disgruntled veterans and clandestine members, primarily in the western districts, and by late 2005 rumors surfaced that he was providing weapons to civilians. It is not possible to determine if Lobato actually distributed weapons at that time or simply approached disaffected veterans in anticipation of the need for political muscle in the future. In either case, Lobato's patronage of these groups gave rise to speculation in Bobonaro and Liquica districts that armed 'ninjas' linked to him were intimidating the population. The F-FDTL officer corps was deeply concerned about these developments, not only because armed civilians posed a real security threat, but also because the recipients of weapons included former Falintil members who had not been recruited into F-FDTL.[6]

Second, the corporate unity of F-FDTL also came under threat as allegations emerged that officers from the east were discriminating against personnel from the western districts. In September 2003, Lieutenant Domingos 'Deker' Agusto, a former Falintil commander from Ermera District and one of the few westerners in the officer corps, was discharged from F-FDTL; soon thereafter he joined several other former Falintil commanders from the west in the opposition PD. In December 2003, 42 more soldiers, mostly from the west, were discharged for being absent from duty. *Vox Populi*, a weekly magazine closely associated with PD, made this its cover story, running the provocative headline 'Westerners vs. Easterners in F-FDTL'. Incidents like these led senior F-FDTL officers to believe

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that opposition political parties were using the regional imbalances in the military to further undermine its corporate unity. Subsequently, a presidential commission charged with investigating problems within F-FDTL highlighted grievances over conditions, home leave, and allegations of discrimination by easterners against westerners. No action was taken, however, and a group of soldiers again forwarded complaints about bias in the promotional process to President Gusmão in early 2005 (ICG 2006: 6).

Finally, the F-FDTL officer corps faced growing uncertainty about the 'client' they served. At the time of independence, officers were committed to defending the nation-state that they had fought so long and hard to establish. Senior F-FDTL officers were personally loyal to President Gusmão but remained highly suspicious of anti-Fretelin parties allied with Gusmão, which they blamed for politicizing the east–west issue among the troops. And while most soldiers continued to accept the notion of civilian supremacy in the formulation of policy, anxiety arose over whether obedience to the Fretilin government meant supporting what opposition politicians were now openly charging was the establishment of an authoritarian regime. Apparently, the political schism and emerging tug-of-war over the security forces triggered increasing confusion within the officer corps about the identity and legitimacy of the client it was supposed to obey.

The 2006 crisis and beyond

It was in this context of growing uncertainty that tensions within F-FDTL spilled over into open political conflict. In January 2006, 159 soldiers sent a new petition to President Gusmão complaining about discrimination within F-FDTL, and a month later they demonstrated in front of the presidential palace. In response, the government established a commission headed by F-FDTL Chief of Staff Colonel Lere to investigate the grievances. This did little to alleviate the situation, however, and by late February several hundred soldiers had left their bases in protest against the alleged regional and political discrimination. Rather surprisingly, President Gusmão turned the matter over to Prime Minister Alkatiri before going overseas on state business. After consulting with his legal advisors, Alkatiri gave the green light for F-FDTL commander Taur Matan Ruak to dismiss 593 soldiers from F-FDTL for desertion.

After his return to Dili, however, President Gusmão expressed his disagreement with the decision and, ignoring institutional channels, sought to reverse it through force of personality. On 23 March, he gave a fiery speech in which he rejected the dismissals and sided with the petitioners. In early April, Gusmão held an Easter party at his home for senior F-FDTL officers and former Falintil commanders at which he told his guests that the issue of discrimination within F-FDTL should be resolved 'within the family'. Senior officers were shocked by the presence of former comrades with whom they were at odds, and troubled by the president's attempt to overturn a decision made by the highest civilian authorities.[7] A week later, President Gusmão, Prime Minister Alkatiri, and F-FDTL commander Taur Matan Ruak reached an agreement that the dismissed soldiers would continue to

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receive their salaries until the problem was resolved through a formal legal process (Ramos-Horta 2006). But even this agreement failed to de-escalate the situation. On the contrary, the petitioners requested permission from PNTL to hold demonstrations in front of the *Palácio do Governo, the main seat of government*. PNTL Commissioner Martins approved the request and promised to provide security. The demonstrations continued for several days, with non-petitioners joining in and the tone of speeches increasingly directed against the Alkatiri government. The demonstrations eventually turned violent on 28 April: cars were burned, and one policeman and one civilian were killed. In consultation with his cabinet, F-FDTL, and PNTL, Prime Minister Alkatiri made the controversial decision that F-FDTL would be deployed to assist the police in restoring order.[8]

The failure of civilians to adequately address intra-military and inter-service rivalries led to a temporary breakdown of civilian supremacy over the security forces. On 3 May, after meeting with the F-FDTL petitioners, the Commander of the Military Police, Major Alfredo Reinado, defected from the military. The joint army–police patrols in Dili were subsequently called off and F-FDTL was withdrawn to the outskirts of the city. In response, Minister Lobato on 7 May distributed weapons to Vicente 'Railos' da Conceição, who had been suspended from F-FDTL in 2004 for smuggling. In combination, these events set the stage for three separate armed attacks on F-FDTL between 23 and 25 May. First, Major Reinado ambushed F-FDTL troops on the eastern outskirts of Dili, to which F-FDTL reacted by distributing weapons to Falintil veterans opposed to Lobato. The following day, an armed group led by Railos attacked F-FDTL headquarters in Tacitolu, and police officers in alliance with a member of parliament used high-powered weapons to hit the home of F-FDTL commander Taur Matan Ruak. Finally, these acts provoked F-FDTL personnel to retaliate by gunning down nine PNTL officers in downtown Dili on 25 May (ICG 2006; COI 2006).

The outbreak of violence within and between the security forces and the corresponding polarization of society along east–west lines set the stage for an opposition putsch against the Fretilin government. President Gusmão and Foreign Minister Ramos-Horta pressured Prime Minister Alkatiri to make a joint request for the deployment of Australian troops to restore order. The first of these troops arrived on 25 May. Gusmão then declared that he had taken control of security affairs (although the legal grounds for this were unclear) and demanded that Minister of the Interior Lobato and Secretary of State for Defense Rodrigues be sacked. Alkatiri again acquiesced on both counts. After a series of demonstrations in Dili attacking Alkatiri for allegedly attempting to kill opposition politicians, for being a 'communist', a 'terrorist,' and 'anti-Catholic', Gusmão issued the prime minister with an ultimatum, and on 27 June Alkatiri resigned. Although the security forces had been brought under control, communal violence between easterners and westerners continued to engulf Dili, and tens of thousands of people were displaced from their homes.

These moves on the domestic front triggered developments in the international arena that had equally important implications for the security sector. Throughout May and June 2006, Ramos-Horta called for a new UN mission in Timor-Leste.

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In August, the UN Security Council responded by passing Resolution 1704, which mandated the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT). The initial Australian force of 1,300 military personnel was supplemented by the arrival of 1,200 troops from Malaysia, New Zealand, and Portugal within the International Stabilization Force (ISF), and another 1,600 UN Police were attached to UNMIT. The UN also appointed a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the violence between 28 April and 25 May. Issued in October, the Commission's report provided a detailed account of the violence and criticized the government for failing to address the 'lack of a national security policy and problems evident within and between PNTL and F-FDTL' (COI 2006: 75). The report recommended further investigations be conducted and called for the prosecution of several individuals, including Lobato, Rodrigues, Taur Matan Ruak, and F-FDTL Chief of Staff Lere Anan Timor, all for illegal distribution of weapons (COI 2006). Although Lobato was prosecuted and sentenced to a seven-year jail term, no other high ranking officials were brought to court. Lobato, for his part, initially left Timor-Leste for Malaysia, but returned in 2010 after receiving a presidential pardon.

The government's post-crisis approach to Timor-Leste's security forces was highly uneven. PNTL officers were disarmed and subjected to a complicated review process before being allowed back on active duty. By contrast, no legal or disciplinary action was taken against F-FDTL. In the words of the International Crisis Group, F-FDTL 'soldiers were dealt with as individuals; the police was punished as an institution' (ICG 2008: 16). The reason for this differential approach was patently political: in the view of Gusmão and his allies, PNTL needed to be cleansed of the harmful tampering of Rogerio Lobato, but F-FDTL, which had stepped back from siding with Fretilin at the last minute, was viewed as both loyal and a key new ally, and hence beyond reproach. With the government in limbo and parties waiting anxiously for the national elections due to be held in 2007, the security sector was once again exposed as an unstructured and 'policy free zone'.[9]

Despite the presence of the ISF and UNPOL, violence persisted. Throughout late 2006 and early 2007, martial arts groups, former clandestine organizations, and unemployed youths fought in the streets of Dili. Former Military Police Commander Major Reinado posed a particular security threat. Between May and late July, Reinado and a band of former military police, the police's rapid intervention unit, and petitioners based in the central mountains issued repeated political demands. Reinado was finally arrested on 26 July, but a month later he broke out of jail and again took to the mountains with weapons. In March 2007, President Gusmão asked the ISF to capture Reinado, but the ensuing operation failed. Whatever desire Gusmão and Ramos-Horta had to detain Reinado was tempered by their political calculations that Reinado's staunchly anti-Fretilin position, which was remarkably popular in the western districts, would boost their own prospects in the upcoming elections.

Party leaders across the political spectrum promised that the national elections and formation of a new government would resolve the crisis. Initially, these

hopes seemed to materialize, with Ramos-Horta easily winning the second round of presidential elections in May. In the June 2007 parliamentary election, Fretilin won 29 percent of the vote, Gusmão's CNRT 24 percent, the ASDT–PSD alliance 15 percent, and PD 11 percent. As Fretilin was unable to garner support from other parties, President Ramos-Horta appointed Gusmão, who headed the CNRT–ASDT–PSD–PD Alliance for a Parliamentary Majority, to form a coalition government. Gusmão was installed as prime minister and simultaneously held the post of minister of defense. Fretilin leaders rejected his election, however, and party loyalists burned tires in the capital and staged violent attacks on their political rivals in the eastern districts.

After the elections, efforts to reform the security sector focused on the dual problems posed by the petitioners and Alfredo Reinado. But in both cases, policy choices were constrained by the vested interests of the F-FDTL leadership. Gusmão insisted that the petitioners be paid three year's salary as compensation for their unfair dismissal and be accepted back into the military. This was rejected by the F-FDTL, which insisted that the petitioners were defectors and announced plans to recruit 600 new members to bring the force back to full strength. As government efforts to hold talks with the petitioners and to coax Reinado into surrendering broke down, Gusmão turned the problem over to the president. Ramos-Horta, for his part, threatened to resign as supreme commander of F-FDTL if the petitioners were not accepted back into the force. However, a full resolution of the complex security problems posed by the petitioners, Reinado's armed group, as well as the displaced population and gang violence in Dili required a political compromise between the Prime Minister, the military, and Fretilin.

In order to reach such a compromise, Ramos-Horta apparently engaged in secret talks with Fretilin leaders and Prime Minister Gusmão in January 2008. The alleged agreement called for Reinado and his supporters to be tried in absentia, for Fretilin to encourage displaced people to vacate the camps in Dili and return to their homes, and for snap national elections to be held.[10] Before the deal could be put in place, however, Reinado and one of his men were shot dead and Ramos-Horta was seriously wounded in an incident at the president's residence. The official version of events is that Reinado and Gastão Salsinha, the leader of the petitioners, attempted to assassinate Ramos-Horta and President Gusmão. An Australian Federal Police report, by contrast, suggested that Reinado may have been lured to Ramos-Horta's compound and executed at close range.[11] Whatever the truth was, this development dramatically increased the bargaining position of F-FDTL *vis-à-vis* the president, the prime minister, and political parties in the coalition government. On the day of the attack, the acting president declared a two-day state of emergency, which was subsequently extended for 40 days. A series of new decree-laws and government resolutions provided a legal framework for 'security operations' to be carried out by F-FDTL and PNTL. The Reinado incident also seemed to vindicate F-FDTL's refusal to accept the reintegration of the petitioners (some of whom participated in the assassination attempt) and for insisting that those involved in crimes (including the 2006 attacks on F-FDTL) be brought to justice. Furthermore, the declaration of a state of siege and resolutions

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for joint F-FDTL–PNTL operations, in which the police was clearly a junior partner, established a new precedent for military involvement in internal security affairs.

Since the shootings in early 2008, the Gusmão-led coalition government has once more emphasized the urgent need to further reform the security sector. This includes the formulation of a comprehensive security sector policy, passage of enabling legislation, the effective definition and separation of military and police responsibilities, and increasing the capacity of the PNTL as well as the resumption of its internal policing duties (RDTL 2007). Progress on each of these fronts has been limited. Despite the formation of a government-run Group for the Reform and Development of the Security Sector, a UN Security Sector Support Unit, and plans for a coordinated review, a full assessment has not yet been completed. The government has achieved some success in the legislative arena with passage of decrees approving the Organic Statute of the Ministry of Defense and Security (2008), a National Security Law (2009), and regulations on military service and military justice.[12] Far less progress has been made, however, in defining the separate responsibilities of the military and police, and there are clear indications that – despite rhetoric to the contrary – the military high command does not want to turn domestic security over to the PNTL. Meanwhile, the most significant changes have taken place within the defense force, including the recruitment of nearly 600 new soldiers, bringing the force back up to pre-crisis levels, and the purchase of Chinese patrol ships for the small naval force. While new legislation, recruitment, and weapons are useful indicators of some movement in the security sector, their substantive meaning remains unclear in the absence of comprehensive policy, capable civilian oversight, or a genuine commitment to the rule of law.

Explanatory propositions and conclusion

The security sector in Timor-Leste has faced a series of dilemmas characteristic of newly independent, post-conflict states. These include the demobilization of former combatants, the delineation and staffing of new, post-conflict security forces, and the formulation of defense policy and practice. The analysis presented in this chapter has pointed to the mixed results Timor-Leste has achieved in managing these challenges. On the one hand, the formation of new security forces was politically contested and organizationally chaotic, leading to disputes and even violent conflict. The new institutional and doctrinal framework for defense and security policy has been vague, and expertise in both fields remains scarce. On the other hand, the serious crises that Timor-Leste confronted since independence have not led to state failure, as some observers had feared. The military or other security forces have not taken over government from the civilian elite, which continues to rule Timor-Leste – for better or for worse. But rather than simply noting these failures and successes of Timor-Leste's civil–military regime, it is important to explore the reasons behind them. In the scholarly literature, a myriad of propositions is usually offered to explain the highly diverse paths for states undergoing transitions in their civil–military relations. In the following, I will discuss three of

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the most influential factors raised by the literature (historical legacies, international factors, and the quality of civilian governance) and evaluate their relevance for the case of Timor-Leste.

One of the most frequently discussed factors influencing the state of civil–military relations is related to historical legacies. Particular historical patterns can either smooth or obstruct a country's way to effective security sector governance. In Timor-Leste's case, contradictory historical dynamics were at work. While Falintil played a crucial role in achieving Timor-Leste's independence and therefore should have been expected to become an autonomous, politically interventionist military in the post-independence state (as was the case with the Indonesian army after 1945), the armed resistance had also been effectively subordinated to civilian leadership. Whether the Marxist-Leninist orientation of the movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s was responsible for this subservience or not (socialist regimes such as Vietnam have a strong tradition of effectively subordinating their armed forces), it appears to have nurtured a natural sense of acceptance for civilian supremacy in Timor-Leste's military leaders, and may help to explain the absence of coups in even the most difficult security crises in the post-2002 polity.

The second particular historical legacy important for Timor-Leste's civil–military relations was the role of the UN. In establishing Timor-Leste's new security forces, the UN unwittingly allowed the institutionalization of potentially explosive sociological cleavages both within and between the new security forces. Most importantly, the UN oversaw the entrenchment of severe regional imbalances in the organization of the armed forces, which both reflected and aggravated divisions in other segments of Timor-Leste's society. These conditions led to the ironic situation in which the ostensibly apolitical establishment of new defense forces and the definition of security doctrines took place within the context of intense societal contestation over the heroic armed resistance and the format of Timor-Leste's emerging polity. Seen in this light, it is all the more remarkable that the newly formed F-FDTL neither saw itself as a political player nor actively sought to intervene in the political process.

International influences are also often mentioned as a determinant of civil–military relations, particularly in post-authoritarian or post-conflict states. The threat of sanctions or the offer of foreign aid can convince governments to adopt democratic reforms, while states that insulate themselves from such external influences are sometimes reluctant to adjust their security sectors to international standards of security sector governance. In Timor-Leste, international influences were significant, but in a somewhat different manner. The establishment of a UN mission and the deployment of foreign troops provided crucial support for the stabilization of security affairs after the 1999 violence. Whenever Timor-Leste's security was threatened, international intervention helped the country to restore order. After the 2006 unrest, for instance, the UN and Australian soldiers backed José Ramos-Horta and Xanana Gusmão's efforts to calm down the security situation before launching new attempts at structural reform. Without this involvement of international agencies and militaries, Timor-Leste would have found it difficult to overcome the serious security challenges of the early post-independence period.

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The impact of foreign intervention in Timor-Leste was not always positive, however. Generally, the presence of the UN and foreign troops created disincentives for Timor-Leste's elite to establish an independent security system and settle problems quickly and comprehensively. The 2006 decision – taken during the crisis – to postpone major decisions on the security sector until after the 2007 elections was one example of this. The result of this strategy was that virtually nothing was done for nearly a year to address the problem of one hundred thousand displaced people, the petitioners, or the criminal former Military Police Commander, Alfredo Reinado. The failure to deal with these issues led to their escalation in 2008 and the alleged attempted assassination of the president and prime minister. The subsequent declaration of a state of siege and military operations increased the role of the F-FDTL, which had remained studiously neutral in the face of politicization and intense intra-civilian conflict but now saw its power rising as a result.

The final factor assessed here is the quality of civilian governance. In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness in the scholarly literature that the role of the military in politics and society is not only determined by internal developments in the defense and security sector, but also by the quality and stability of civilian governance as a whole. Stable, effective, cohesive, and popular governments are much more likely to be able to fend off politically interventionist militaries than administrations that are poorly run and plagued by high levels of intra-civilian conflict. In Timor-Leste, the quality of civilian governance following the restoration of independence in May 2002 was severely hampered by the simultaneous establishment of a civil service, budget constraints, and unrealistically high expectations about economic growth and the provision of services by the state. Occupied with addressing these problems, the Fretilin government paid scant attention to the establishment of an effective legal system and the institutionalization of civilian supremacy over the new military.

By 2006 the combination of poor government performance, ill-advised security sector policies, and the political polarization between the government and the opposition parties caused a severe crisis in civil–military relations. It did so, I have argued, by threatening three core areas of military professionalism. First, the creation of specialized paramilitary police units threatened the military's superiority in the management of violence, and the alleged distribution of weapons to civilians undermined the monopoly of violence typically held by the state's security agencies. Second, the F-FDTL officer corps viewed the politicization of internal discord by the media and opposition parties as a challenge to its corporate unity. And third, the deepening of political polarization between 2002 and 2006, personified in the figures of Gusmão and Alkatiri, drew into question the 'client' the military was supposed to serve. Thus, when it came under attack, the military attempted to defend its institutional autonomy from politicization by civilians, destabilizing security sector governance in the process.

Accordingly, the key proposition advanced in this chapter is that politicization of the security forces by civilians, and not the military's interest or intention of intervening in politics, was the primary cause of the paralysis of civil–military

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relations in Timor-Leste in 2006. The restoration of order since the 2007 elections, however, should not be assumed to mean that the Gusmão-led AMP government has institutionalized more meaningful civilian rule. Instead, the current *status quo* is an indication that the government has once again made the security sector a policy-free zone, not because of direct resistance from the military, but rather because it is reluctant to take any measures that might alienate important allies or provide an opening for the opposition to politicize the security sector. So long as elected office, positions in the civil service, and other state institutions remain the only reliable form of employment and control over budgets the primary source of capital accumulation, there is little reason to think that a key executive agency such as the military could be completely insulated from political contestation. For the foreseeable future, therefore, Timor-Leste's security sector will continue to suffer from systemic over-politicization. The violent 2006 crisis serves as a reminder that, as a crucial repository of the state's coercive means, F-FDTL will remain an arbiter of political outcomes. Against this background, the question of just how long the military will refrain from aligning itself with any of the competing civilian forces – or seek a dominant role for itself – becomes an increasingly central issue.

Notes

1 This contrasts with the claims made by Gusmão, who contends that Marxism-Leninism was adopted in 1977 and abandoned in 1981, when he initiated a policy of national unity (Gusmão 1999; Shoesmith 2003; CAVR 2005; ICG 2006).
2 In 1998, CNRM was transformed into CNRT, an umbrella organization of pro-independence groups.
3 This group counted among its supporters a number of prominent Falintil commanders who were at odds with the F-FDTL, as well as individuals who later joined opposition political parties. Interestingly, it also tried to tap into program funds offered by international NGOs such as The Asia Foundation. See 'Proposal Project' (01/Falintil/IV/02), submitted to the Asia Foundation, dated 21 April 2002, in the author's possession.
4 While UN and foreign reports claimed that this involved former militia from West Timor, senior East Timorese officials insisted that the problem was a group called Colimau 2000 and former Falintil, not militia previously loyal to Indonesia.
5 *Timor Post*, 16 September 2003.
6 Interview with senior F-FDTL officer, Tacitolu, Dili, 11 September 2007.
7 Interview with senior F-FDTL officer, Tacitolu, Dili, 11 September 2007.
8 Some sources have claimed that on or before 28 April F-FDTL distributed weapons to Falintil veterans from the east, who assisted in the operation. See *UNOTIL Daily Media Review*, 26 April 2006, and *Suara Timor Leste*, 9 August 2006. Mari Alkatiri has denied such charges. Interview, Dili, 11 September 2009.
9 The one exception to this was passage of a bill in October 2006 – which had already been drafted prior to the outbreak of the crisis – making military service mandatory for all men in Timor-Leste.
10 Personal communications with sources in Dili. For a stronger claim, see Boughton (2008).
11 'Guards Gun Didn't Kill Alfredo Reinado', *The Australian*, 20 July 2009.
12 See, for example, Julio Tomás Pinto, 'Reforming the Security Sector: Facing Challenges, Achieving Progress in Timor Leste,' *Timor Post*, 18 and 19 August, 2009. Pinto was secretary of state for defense at that time.

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7 The political marginalization of the military in Indonesia

Democratic consolidation, leadership, and institutional reform

Marcus Mietzner

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In late July 2001, Indonesia's democratic experiment appeared to come to a dramatic end. While the post-1998 transition from Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime to a new democratic system had always been messy, the events leading up to July 2001 brought the country to the brink of constitutional collapse. The increasingly erratic President Abdurrahman Wahid had issued a decree to formally disband the People's Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR) and the People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*, MPR), which were in the process of impeaching him.[1] With the president's supporters from his home area of East Java threatening to march towards Jakarta, the capital prepared for massive violence on its streets. Worse still, Wahid not only sacked one police chief and installed another without the necessary approval of the DPR, he also warned the head of the army that he would be arrested should the military try to prevent presidential loyalists from storming the MPR building. Eventually, the MPR removed Wahid from the presidency and appointed his deputy, Megawati Sukarnoputri, as the new head of state. While Wahid initially refused to leave the palace, he was subsequently convinced by his family to take a 'vacation' in the United States. In the midst of this chaos, there seemed to be only one clear winner: the Indonesian armed forces (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, TNI), which had been the backbone of Suharto's government but was on the defensive since his sudden fall. The fight over Wahid's presidency moved TNI back into the spotlight, allowing it to decide which side would prevail. TNI's decision to back Wahid's opponents was a game changer in the conflict, and the generals had strong reasons to believe that the new power holders would reward them handsomely.

It was no surprise, then, that assessments of Indonesian civil–military relations in the early 2000s were less than glowing. Writing in Alagappa's 2001 volume on the declining political role of the military in Asia, Geoffrey Robinson (2001: 247) stated that there was 'room for pessimism', emphasizing that 'the post-1998 reforms have left largely intact ideological and institutional foundations of military power' (2001: 250). Indeed, beside the destabilizing impact of the Wahid presidency, there had been other developments that highlighted the continued problems of establishing a functioning democracy and bringing the military under control. Most importantly, the 1999 bloodshed surrounding East Timor's vote for independence had pointed to the failure of the civilian government in Jakarta to

control the actions of TNI in the field, leading to major damage to Indonesia's international reputation and throwing the success of post-Suharto reforms into doubt. Furthermore, the 'culture of violence' (Robinson 2001: 241) prevalent in both TNI's leadership and its ordinary troops continued to manifest itself in other conflict spots around the archipelago, whether in Aceh, Papua, Central and West Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, or the troubled islands of the Moluccas.

A decade later, however, Indonesia almost looked like a different country: the civilian polity had stabilized, separatist and communal conflict subsided, Indonesia's elections were internationally recognized as the most democratic in Southeast Asia, and the military was increasingly marginalized (Mietzner and Aspinall 2010). Under the leadership of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono since 2004, Indonesia completed its drawn-out post-authoritarian transition and entered into an early phase of democratic consolidation. Yudhoyono, a retired military officer himself, established firm personal control over TNI, forcing it to institutionally support a wide range of policies that many generals privately opposed. Equipped with two overwhelming electoral victories in direct and democratic polls, and supported by consistently high approval rates unprecedented in the Western world, Yudhoyono possessed the legitimacy and authority that all his post-Suharto predecessors had so desperately lacked. While Indonesia's democracy in general and its civil–military relations in particular have continued to exhibit severe structural and institutional defects (Aspinall 2010), its ability to overcome the 2001 crisis and establish itself as a functioning polity must stand as one of the greatest success stories in the history of post-authoritarian transitions. This achievement was particularly remarkable since Indonesia's democracy consolidated in a period when its Southeast Asian neighbors Thailand and the Philippines saw a significant decline in their democratic quality and a corresponding increase in the political influence of their militaries (Hutchcroft 2008; Funston 2009).

This chapter discusses the extent and dynamics of military engagement in Indonesian politics and society after 2001. It begins with an overview of TNI's history between 1945 and 2001, highlighting its claim to have achieved Indonesia's independence and its participation in two successive authoritarian regimes. The second section analyzes the military's involvement in Indonesia's contemporary polity, with particular attention paid to its role in political institutions, the economy, security affairs, and society. The section will demonstrate that TNI's political and economic influence has declined considerably since 2001, despite a lack of meaningful institutional reform in the security sector. In the third part, I test several explanatory propositions to explain the decline in TNI's significance, among them historical legacies, the quality of civilian governance and leadership, internal military developments, and international factors. After weighing the importance of the various factors, the chapter will conclude by zooming in on political leadership as the major determinant of the quality of democratic control over the Indonesian armed forces after 2001. This conclusion has very complex implications for the future of Indonesian civil–military relations: on the one hand, it means that measured political leadership can overcome the historical legacies

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of military-backed authoritarianism. On the other hand, however, it also points to the absence of strong institutional mechanisms that could insulate the oversight of TNI from the fluctuations of day-to-day politics and the inevitable changes in leadership in post-Yudhoyono Indonesia.

The Indonesian military: a brief history, 1945–2001

Founded in October 1945 as TKR (*Tentara Keamanan Rakyat*, People's Security Force), the Indonesian military constituted one of the first institutions of the young and struggling nation. The leader of the independence movement, Sukarno, had declared Indonesia's independence in August 1945 after Japan's capitulation, but the new republic soon faced an invasion by the returning Dutch colonial forces. The armed conflict between Sukarno's government and the Dutch handed TKR a key role in the new state, with military operations absorbing much of the civilian administration's attention, energy, and resources (Said 1992). Initially, TKR consisted of loosely associated local militias, but in the course of the war, the government achieved some measure of centralization. The renaming of the military into TNI in May 1947 was supposed to symbolize the success of this unification and rationalization. In reality, however, TNI suffered from continued fragmentation, contributing to a series of heavy military defeats. By late 1948, Dutch advances had shrunk the territory of the Indonesian Republic to a few enclaves in Sumatra and Java, and the Sukarno government had little prospect of regaining momentum. Ultimately, it was the United States that put an end to the Dutch offensive. Concerned that the brutal actions of its European ally could undermine the authority of the newly founded United Nations (which had called on the Dutch to relent), Washington pressured the Netherlands to give up its colonial aspirations and agree to negotiations that eventually led to the handover of sovereignty to the new Indonesian state in December 1949 (Kahin and Kahin 1995: 32–3).

Despite the fact that diplomats had negotiated Indonesia's sovereignty after a decisive intervention by the US, TNI viewed its armed struggle as the main factor in the Dutch surrender. Its generals believed that TNI's display of uncompromising heroism had kept the spirit of the nation alive at a time when ordinary Indonesians felt desperate and the civilian government was ready to capitulate. While there is an element of truth in this, TNI historians ensured that the military's role in the war for independence was greatly exaggerated (Mietzner 2009: 41–2). The inflated view of its own contribution to Indonesia's nationhood, in turn, served as the basis for the development of TNI's self-perception, ideology, and doctrine. Portraying itself as a bipartisan guardian of national interests, TNI insisted that it was an indispensable counterbalance to civilian infighting and incompetence. From this conviction, TNI extrapolated a natural right to play a role in the country's political, social, and economic affairs. But like the Burmese military, which also claimed responsibility for the nation's independence and developed a similar sense of post-war entitlement, TNI found its expectations initially disappointed. The polity that emerged in the early 1950s – a parliamentary democracy – had little room

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for a politically ambitious military. Instead, party leaders, Muslim figures, ethnic organizations, and other civilian associations dominated early post-independence politics. The military only found an opportunity to raise its political profile after the civilian state descended into crisis in the mid-1950s (Feith 1962). Unable to agree on a new constitution and crippled by regional rebellions, the parliamentary and executive elite became increasingly unpopular and self-destructive. By 1958, the military was convinced that its time had come (Sundhaussen 1982).

TNI's aspiration for increased political participation motivated the officer corps to support the abortion of democracy in favor of authoritarian rule. Aligning itself with Sukarno, who had been frustrated over his own political marginalization after 1950, the military agreed to the establishment of a military-backed autocracy under the president's leadership. This new polity, announced in 1959 and called Guided Democracy, offered TNI institutionalized political engagement in the form of bureaucratic positions and extraordinary powers based on martial law regulations (Feith 1967). Reflecting the military's 'Middle Way' doctrine developed in 1958 – according to which the military wanted a share of power in exchange for not demanding complete political hegemony – TNI was an integral part of Sukarno's regime. However, this regime was also supported by the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, Indonesian Communist Party), forcing the military into an uneasy coexistence with its eternal archrival. Fearing that the ailing and increasingly idiosyncratic Sukarno might eventually relinquish power to the PKI, senior generals began to contemplate scenarios under which the military would not only have influence on, but dictate the direction of the state. The opportunity to realize this scenario presented itself on 30 September 1965. After an amateurishly organized coup attempt by a small PKI clique, the military under then Major General Suharto took power, purged the PKI, and gradually removed Sukarno from the presidency. Following an unprecedented massacre of around 500,000 suspected communists (Roosa 2006) and around three years of political maneuverings, Suharto was permanently installed in the presidency in 1968.

The military was a key component of Suharto's New Order regime for more than three decades, but its level of influence was far from static. In its early years (1966–78), the New Order was essentially a praetorian regime. The vast majority of government posts were held by military officers, and generals expanded their economic empire by taking control of state companies, acquiring monopolies, and developing lucrative cooperatives and foundations (Sundhaussen 1978). Ideologically, the military justified its political involvement with the new *dwifungsi* (dual function) doctrine, which granted the armed forces both security and non-security roles. Sidelining political parties and previously influential societal organizations, Suharto and the armed forces established a political system specifically tailored to their needs. The number of parties was limited to three, elections were heavily manipulated, and Suharto had himself reappointed to the presidency every five years by a hand-picked MPR. But as Suharto grew older and more experienced, the generational gap between him and the much younger, incumbent military leadership widened considerably. Consequently, after his retirement from the military in 1978, Suharto began to transform the New Order from a military

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regime into a personalized autocracy. Integrating civilian groups and individuals into his government, he broadened his power base and reduced the influence of the armed forces as a result. By the early 1990s, as Suharto's regime underwent a process of increasing 'sultanization' (Aspinall 2005), the armed forces were more and more turned into a palace guard for the ageing president. Run by Suharto's adjutants, relatives, and cronies, the military in the late New Order was thus 'relegated to agent status along with the rest of society' (Mares 1998: 7).

Nevertheless, when Suharto fell in May 1998 as a consequence of the Asian Financial Crisis, mass demonstrations, and splits in the elite (Mietzner 2009: 97–194), the military was deeply distressed by the loss of its patron. While some officers had privately been critical of Suharto's leadership (Honna 2003), the democratic reforms promised by his successor, B.J. Habibie, threatened to take away many of the privileges that the military had enjoyed under the New Order. Politically, the introduction of competitive elections and the almost uncontrolled mushrooming of parties reduced the significance of the military as a key power broker. With most restrictions on the media lifted, the armed forces also faced a level of public scrutiny and criticism unknown since the 1950s. In ideological terms, the unobstructed circulation of and fierce contest between ideas, platforms, and paradigms conflicted with the military's traditional belief in order, regulation, and state-led harmonization. Needless to say, the *dwifungsi* doctrine also had to be shelved. Economically, the loss of the military's political influence translated into a decline of its ability to gain privileged access to resources, monies, and other financial favors. Finally, the regime change also questioned the military's monopoly on domestic security, which the armed forces had held since the regional rebellions of the late 1950s. Habibie, who had come to admire the German federal police during his stay there from the 1950s to the 1970s, pushed the separation of the police from the armed forces, weakening TNI in the process. In short, Suharto's fall led to a severe identity crisis in the officer corps, with both its ideological mission and corporate interests undermined by the new democratic system.

But as demonstrated by the Wahid imbroglio, the early post-Suharto polity offered many opportunities for the military to dig in and defend its interests. Serious conflicts among civilian elites over the leadership and direction of the state prevented democracy from taking root quickly, triggering instability in the center as well as in the regions. There was no clear regulatory framework for political competition and conflict resolution in place, with the president still indirectly elected by the MPR in 1999 and other institutions undergoing trial-and-error experiments. The military took advantage of this chaos, slowing down reforms and demanding concessions from civilians that asked TNI for its support in intra-elite struggles. The institutional weakness of the central government between 1998 and 2001 led to a series of communal conflicts throughout Indonesia, from religious clashes in Maluku and Central Sulawesi to ethnic strife in West and Central Kalimantan (Bertrand 2004). Separatist movements in Aceh, Papua, and East Timor also felt encouraged by Jakarta's declining authority, with the latter of the three provinces gaining its independence after a referendum in 1999. This precarious security situation highlighted the continued importance of TNI for

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the new civilian government, convincing the political elite to reduce its reform pressure on the military. Thus, by the end of 2001, the armed forces felt much more confident about their position in the post-authoritarian regime than they did immediately after the end of the New Order (Mietzner 2009: 225–35). However, this reinvigorated sense of optimism in the officer corps began to evaporate much sooner than the TNI leadership had anticipated.

The military in politics, the economy, and society after 2001

While the Wahid presidency had almost caused the collapse of the democratic polity, it also gave rise to an important recognition within Indonesia's elite: the political system created after 1998 was unworkable and needed urgent repair. Therefore, in a demonstration of elite unity unprecedented since 1949, the MPR passed comprehensive constitutional amendments in 2001 and 2002 that dramatically revamped the institutional set-up of the democratic polity (Crouch 2010). At the core of these reforms were the introduction of direct presidential elections and the establishment of a constitutional court as Indonesia's main arbitrator for political conflict. Following these changes (which the armed forces had opposed), Indonesia's polity stabilized considerably. With the first direct presidential elections held in 2004 and the constitutional court establishing its authority swiftly with verdicts respected by all sides (Mietzner 2010), Indonesia left its messy transition behind and began to take the first steps towards democratic consolidation. Under the moderate, non-polarizing leadership of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Indonesia even managed to grow its economy by a healthy average of 6 percent per annum. Obviously, these developments had significant consequences for the armed forces. Just as the military had profited from the destabilization of the polity in 2000 and 2001, it now saw its influence drastically reduced by the consolidation of the state and the end of large-scale conflict. In the following section, the decline of military involvement in post-2001 politics will be documented by closely analyzing TNI's role in four traditional areas of military engagement: political institutions, the economy, security affairs, and society.

The military's role in political institutions after 2001

Under Yudhoyono, the involvement of TNI in Indonesia's political institutions fell to its lowest level since the 1950s. In 2004, military representation in the legislatures, which had previously handed TNI 38 seats in the national DPR and 10 percent of the seats in each local parliament, was phased out. As a result, several hundred middle-ranking officers had to leave the political arena, with some of them returning to active service while others retired. In cabinet, only the incumbent armed forces commander has been allowed to hold active service status, and the number of ministers with previous military affiliations has also declined. While Indonesia has had successive civilian ministers of defense since 1999, Yudhoyono in 2009 appointed a career bureaucrat to the crucial ministry of home affairs, which had been a traditional TNI stronghold since the 1960s. Arguably,

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this appointment was even more significant than that of a civilian defense minister, given the vast resources at the disposal of the home ministry and its unrivalled network in the regions. In Yudhoyono's 2009 cabinet, four retired military officers held portfolios, one less than in Suharto's last cabinet. However, two of these ex-officers were given peripheral ministries, and one among them was apparently appointed primarily because he was ethnic Papuan. In the same vein, the number of former generals in senior local government posts has dropped to unparalleled lows. While during the early New Order 80 percent of all governors were from the military, that number fell to 40 percent in the late 1980s and to less than 10 percent in 2010.[2] In the field of local politics, TNI and its former officers have been well and truly sidelined by powerful bureaucrats, wealthy entrepreneurs, and locally entrenched political activists (Buehler 2010).

In addition to its weakening grip on legislative and executive positions, the military was also sidelined from other key institutions. For instance, when the Constitutional Court was founded in 2003, one of the nine judges was a retired military officer. Ahmad Roestandi was a fierce defender of military interests on the bench, and while he was mostly outvoted by his colleagues, he was able to voice TNI's point of view on a number of important issues (Mietzner 2010). After Roestandi retired from the court in 2008, however, his replacement was a civilian. Accordingly, TNI could no longer exert influence on the decision-making process in what has become Indonesia's most important judicial institution for high-profile political cases. Similarly, the military lost control over the State Intelligence Agency (*Badan Intelijen Negara*, BIN). For decades, the head of the agency had been a retired three-star general, but Yudhoyono appointed the former police chief Sutanto to the position when he announced his second-term cabinet in October 2009. The appointment of a police officer was particularly painful for TNI, given the increasing rivalry between the military and the police since their separation in 1999. While the military maintained its own intelligence services, it is BIN that has the exclusive right to brief the president and parliament on key political issues. BIN had also been a welcome employment opportunity for retiring TNI officers (Conboy 2004), and while recruitment of military staff has continued, Sutanto has obviously preferred to hire from the institution he formerly led.

However, TNI has maintained significant pockets of political influence. There is no doubt that while Yudhoyono's presidency has restricted the military's room to maneuver, it has also ensured that some of TNI's major interests have been protected. For instance, as the son-in-law of one of the main actors in the massacre of PKI supporters in 1965–6, and as a former senior general himself, Yudhoyono has effectively blocked all efforts to investigate the communist killings and other abuses under the New Order. Significantly, Yudhoyono's father-in-law, Sarwo Edhie Wibowo, was also the officer in charge of the manipulated Act of Free Choice of 1969, in which a number of selected Papuans 'agreed' to make their territory part of Indonesia. Yudhoyono has therefore categorically ruled out a review of the legitimacy of this action, rejecting a key demand of radical Papuan leaders who want to renegotiate their relationship with Jakarta (Chauvel 2010). In the same vein, Yudhoyono has slowed down further institutional reform, defending

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TNI's territorial command structure – the web of units that reaches from the capital to the village level and that has been the military's foundation of power since the 1950s. In addition to Yudhoyono's personal protection of fundamental TNI interests, his Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrat*, PD) has also been an effective political vehicle for retired military officers. Much more so than Suharto's former government party Golkar or Megawati's PDIP (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), Yudhoyono's PD has accommodated former generals in its regional boards and in the legislature. In the national DPR elected in 2009, 6 percent of the PD caucus members were retired TNI personnel, while the overall percentage for the parliament was 2 percent (Kompas 2010).[3]

TNI has also maintained some representation in important government departments, particularly in the security sector. As mentioned earlier, the incumbent commander of the armed forces is still an ex officio member of the wider cabinet, giving him and his organization access to important decision-making processes on policies and resources. Moreover, active military officers have been allowed to serve as staff members and advisers in the Coordinating Ministry for Politics, Law, and Security Affairs, which has traditionally been headed by a retired commander of TNI. While this office has a small budget and thus lacks the clout of the larger government departments, its minister has direct access to the president and is formally empowered to direct other ministries. Most importantly, however, active officers have continued to fill the vast majority of senior administrative positions in the ministry of defense. This phenomenon has led to the often-cited joke that the only civilians in the ministry of defense are the minister and his driver.[4] Crippled by restrictive hiring regulations and the lack of civilians educated in defense studies, the civilian minister has found it difficult to fill senior positions with non-TNI experts.[5] In 2009, the position of deputy minister was introduced, but that was given to a former military general as well. Finally, the office of secretary general, which usually exercises day-to-day control over the ministry, has also remained in the hands of an active three-star officer, as had been the practice even under Suharto. Thus, while the overall involvement of TNI in political institutions has declined significantly, active and retired military officers have managed to occupy a sufficient number of positions in the democratic system to keep the military politically relevant.

TNI's economic involvement and off-budget funding

Under Suharto, the armed forces were one of the country's key economic players. Military officers controlled Indonesia's oil company Pertamina, cooperated with large conglomerates run mostly by ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs, and developed a complex network of foundations and cooperatives (Robison 1986). But the economic crisis of 1997–8 hit the military's interests hard, wiping out most of its own assets and damaging those of its sponsors irreparably. When Indonesia's economy began to recover in the early 2000s, the political environment had changed to TNI's disadvantage, and dramatically so. There was now a myriad of

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competitors reaching for the economic spoils that the new democratic polity had to offer. Without the power of political coercion and intimidation that it had at its disposal under Suharto, TNI found it extremely difficult to make an economic impact. State banks were no longer willing to extend credit to unprofitable military businesses, big corporations no longer needed the services of senior generals, and even multi-national companies felt that they no longer had to involve TNI in all of their projects. When an international auditor reviewed the performance of the businesses operating under a major TNI foundation in 2001, it discovered that most of the companies were technically bankrupt (Ernst & Young 2001). In 2008, a government team asked to assess the value of all military businesses estimated that they were worth Rp. 3.2 trillion (US$ 350 million), and that their business activities generated an annual profit of Rp. 268 billion (US$ 28.5 million) (Tim Nasional 2008). For officers of the Indonesian military, who had famously squeezed US$ 10 billion out of Pertamina in the 1970s, such sums were nothing but a painful reminder of a much more glorious past.

But the decline of TNI's formal businesses did not mean that military officers were no longer engaged in entrepreneurial activities. In fact, the collapse of TNI's economic empire initially forced individual field commanders into a wide range of informal fund-raising activities. These ranged from illegal logging and mining, gambling, and prostitution businesses to drug trafficking and the renting out of TNI land and vehicles to private companies. In conflict areas, officers and soldiers were also engaged in commercial kidnappings, the sale of weapons to conflicting parties, and highly lucrative transportation services in combat zones. In addition to these openly illegal operations, TNI also profited from semi-legal protection services for large corporations. Freeport-McMoRan, for instance, which runs the world's largest copper mine in Papua, spent US$ 10 million in 2009 alone to cover various costs for the approximately 3,000 Indonesian military and police personnel that provide security at the site.[6] In 2006, the last year of exclusive military responsibility for security at the mine before the police took charge in 2007, Freeport had paid US$ 8.5 million for the services of the troops (Mietzner 2009: 364). According to Indonesian law, security forces are not allowed to accept such payments, but despite Freeport's official admission to them, no TNI officer has ever been charged. Apparently, the Indonesian government has continued to turn a blind eye to such practices, knowing that they provide important salary supplements for senior generals and their ordinary troops on the ground.

This large sector of informal and illicit fund-raising was also left untouched when the government finally moved to regulate military businesses. Mandated by the Armed Forces Act of 2004, the Yudhoyono cabinet was legally obliged to develop a blueprint for phasing out all TNI businesses by 2009. It did so with little enthusiasm, focusing on the shrinking number of formal businesses and ignoring the unofficial economic operations by military units and their personnel. In the five years that it took the Yudhoyono government to deliberate the details of the plan, the military sold off the few remaining assets that were still profitable, among them an airline and a share in a major private bank. Yudhoyono eventually signed a presidential decree in 2009, stating that TNI's cooperatives and foundations would

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be reformed but remain under its coordination. One important implication of this stipulation was that only a tiny number of directly military-owned businesses were to be taken over by the state (Mietzner and Misol, forthcoming). There was no word in the decree on the military's informal businesses activities. With this minimalist solution, Yudhoyono had obviously decided to leave the military with a considerable, albeit much reduced source of autonomous income. While the foundations and cooperatives were cleared as legitimate vehicles to generate money for the day-to-day expenses of troops, the silence on the informal entrepreneurial operations signaled tacit government approval of their continuation in the short to medium term.

The lack of decisive government action on military businesses notwithstanding, TNI's role in the economy and off-budget fundraising has changed profoundly since the early 2000s. With most communal violence coming to an end in 2003 and the Aceh conflict resolved in 2005, the economic opportunities for TNI in conflict areas were drastically reduced. Similarly, the increasingly powerful police, criminal gangs, and well-connected strongmen in the regions pushed the military out of many of its protection rackets (Hadiz 2010). These developments, which combined with the erosion of TNI's formal businesses, led to a significant change in the proportion of military self-funding as a percentage of the defense budget. For many decades, Western intelligence services estimated that around 70 percent of TNI's budget was derived from off-budget funds – a figure that was confirmed by then Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono in 2001. However, this number subsequently declined, not only because of the 'crisis' of TNI's commercial enterprises, but also because of simultaneous increases to the official military budget. Between 2002 and 2010, the budget almost quadrupled from US$ 1.2 billion to US$ 4.6 billion (Mietzner and Misol, forthcoming). In 2005, Juwono stated that the percentage of off-budget funds was around 50 percent (Misol 2006: 89–90), and when asked again in 2010 (one year after his retirement as minister of defense), he estimated it to be 20 percent.[7] By contrast, Lex Rieffel and Jaleswari Pramodhawardani (2007: 5) calculated that 'net income generated by the TNI's off-budget activities in 2006 … was equivalent to only 1.5–3.0 percent of the government's defense budget'. While this estimate failed to take into account TNI's informal business activities and was therefore too low, it nevertheless captured the reality of the military's declining economic fortunes in the post-Suharto era.

TNI, security, and internal autonomy

One of the most effective measures of a military's political weight is its ability to manage its internal affairs and claim a significant role in domestic security. In terms of its internal autonomy from the civilian government, the military has faced more interventions under Yudhoyono than at any other point since the late Suharto period. Unlike Megawati, who allowed the military to run its own affairs and plan its operations without much input from civilian leaders, Yudhoyono has adopted a hands-on approach to TNI and its organization. Equipped with an

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intimate knowledge of TNI's structures, norms, and personalities, Yudhoyono has been able to bring the military into line with controversial government decisions and policies. Most importantly, he forced TNI to endorse the negotiated settlement with the separatist Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM) in 2005. Deeply unpopular in the officer corps, the peace agreement marked the first time in Indonesian history that the Indonesian state had entered into a comprehensive and politically balanced contract with an insurgent group. Despite serious misgivings in the ranks, Yudhoyono managed to impose a remarkable extent of discipline on the armed forces, and there were consequently very few public expressions of TNI disgruntlement (Mietzner 2009: 298–304). In the same vein, Yudhoyono succeeded in installing markedly moderate officers as commanders of TNI without creating a backlash from military conservatives. The three commanders he appointed between 2006 and 2010 – Djoko Suyanto, Djoko Santoso, and Agus Suhartono – were all low-profile, soft-spoken officers who supported Yudhoyono's strong subordination of the military. As a result, Yudhoyono had better control over TNI than any other post-Suharto president, severely restricting the military's capacity to act as an autonomous political entity.

In establishing subjective civilian control of TNI, Yudhoyono has partially copied the very personal approach that Suharto had applied in his own rule over the armed forces. One element of this strategy was the use of military classmates, former subordinates, and family relatives to occupy key TNI positions. Djoko Suyanto, the TNI commander in 2006 and 2007, had graduated from the military academy in Yudhoyono's class of 1973, as had Sutanto, the chief of police from 2005 to 2008 and head of BIN after 2009. The chief of staff of the navy from 2005 to 2007, Slamet Soebijanto, was also a member of the 1973 class. Djoko Santoso, for his part, had served under Yudhoyono when the latter was a local commander in Yogyakarta in the 1990s. In addition, several Yudhoyono family members rose through the ranks after 2004. His brother-in-law, Erwin Sujono, commanded the crucial Strategic Reserve (Kostrad) from 2006 to 2007 and retired as chief of staff of general affairs at TNI headquarters in 2008. At the same time, another of Yudhoyono's in-laws, Pramono Edhie Wibowo, became the head of the Special Forces (Kopassus) in 2008, the chief of the Siliwangi unit in West Java in 2009, and commander of Kostrad in 2010. Finally, the military career of Yudhoyono's son Agus also drew much attention and allegations of nepotism. After a much-discussed stint in Lebanon as part of a TNI contingent seconded to the UN, Agus was given a scholarship to Harvard, from which he graduated with a Masters Degree in Public Administration in 2010. Meanwhile, Yudhoyono's second son, Edhie Baskoro, was appointed as secretary general of Yudhoyono's PD in 2010, at the tender age of 29. Previously, another Yudhoyono relative, retired Colonel Hadi Utomo, had been chairman of the party from 2005 to 2010.

With the level of TNI's institutional autonomy significantly reduced as a consequence of Yudhoyono's micro-management, the military's involvement in domestic security has declined as well. In the early post-Suharto period, the military had continued to play a strong role in domestic security, despite the police assuming authority for the latter in 2000. Soldiers on the streets of Jakarta

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were still a common sight at that time, and they were at the forefront of security operations in Aceh, Papua, Maluku, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan (Bertrand 2004). Since the mid-2000s, however, the police has become the main actor in domestic security, requesting military assistance only in exceptional circumstances. Even in the sensitive area of counter-terrorism, the armed forces have been almost entirely sidelined. After the remarkable successes of the police in apprehending key Islamist terrorists between 2002 and 2009, Yudhoyono has seen no reason to include the military substantially in counter-terrorism operations. While the president has often rhetorically pledged to grant TNI such a role, no law or regulation has been adopted in this regard.[8] For TNI, its marginalization from domestic security affairs has been a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it has further reduced TNI's political importance and cut deeply into its fundraising opportunities. On the other hand, the shift has taken TNI out of the spotlight as far as human rights violations in security operations are concerned. In its stead, it is now the police that attracts most of the criticism by human rights watchdogs. For example, when police officers shot and killed eight villagers in Central Sulawesi in September 2010 over a minor dispute, the military could conveniently watch from the sidelines as the police was heavily condemned in the media and civil society circles.

The military and society

Under Suharto, the military was part of everyday life in Indonesia. Officers sat in government, ran newspapers and radio stations, issued recommendation letters for job applications, arrested criminals, and settled both large-scale conflicts in Jakarta and petty disputes in villages (Lowry 1996). After the fall of the New Order, this changed quickly and profoundly. With the military's extraction from political institutions and its marginalization from domestic security affairs, soldiers have lost many of the official or societal privileges that they once enjoyed. In today's Indonesia, a local military commander is no longer the ultimate decision-maker in his territory, whether in a province or a small hamlet. Party bosses, civilian bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, police officers, and even clerics have overtaken TNI members in political and societal significance.

In no other field was the decline of TNI's importance in society more palpable than in the arena of media and public opinion. During the New Order, the armed forces could be certain that an effective censorship regime would protect officers from negative coverage of their actions, and the military had multiple avenues to shape the flow of information and opinions. However, restrictions on the media were lifted almost immediately after Suharto's resignation, triggering a wave of highly critical reporting on the armed forces. Human rights abuses, corruption cases in the military, and brawls among soldiers – issues that were kept tightly under wraps during the Suharto era – have become welcome fodder for the highly competitive post-1998 media market. Officers unable to adjust to the new environment have come under intense public pressure, often forcing TNI to sack them. In September 2010, the military suspended the district commander of

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Karanganyar in Central Java for beating a journalist, despite the officer's tearful and public apologies to his victim.[9] Furthermore, the military's own media outlets fell in decline. Its former flagships *Berita Yudha* (War News) and *Angkatan Bersenjata* (Armed Forces) disappeared in obscurity, leaving TNI with limited opportunities to influence public opinion. While the military has groomed (and paid) civilian proxies to publish opinion pieces in mainstream papers, they have rarely made a significant impact. Similarly, while the military has been an active player in Indonesia's new culture of organized protests and hired crowds, the sheer frequency of such demonstrations (on a normal day, there can be dozens of them at various spots across Jakarta) has reduced their visibility and political usefulness.

But the corrosion of TNI's role in society has also had positive repercussions for the military. Having largely lost its powers of intimidation, TNI has seen a noteworthy rise in its popularity. In the immediate post-Suharto era, opinion surveys had revealed very low approval ratings for TNI, reflecting a backlash in society towards the military's decades-long hegemony. As political, economic, and societal power increasingly shifted to politicians, big business, and the police, however, ordinary Indonesians began to blame them, not the military, for the continued shortcomings in governance. In an opinion survey conducted by LSI (*Lembaga Survei Indonesia*, Indonesian Survey Institute) in January 2010, the armed forces were identified as the most popular institution in the country, with 82 percent of respondents rating its performance as 'good' or 'very good' (LSI 2010). The police achieved only 62 percent, the parliament 52 percent, and political parties finished last with 48 percent. However, such successes in popularity contests did not make TNI satisfied with its much reduced, but also less exposed position in post-Suharto Indonesia. One of the proposals advanced by TNI to reinvigorate its role in society has thus focused on the establishment of a reserve army. Under the regulations contained in a draft law promoted by TNI and the ministry of defense in 2010, all Indonesian citizens between the ages of 18 and 45 would be required to participate each year in 30-day military training courses.[10] While this scheme would not substantially add to the capacity of Indonesia's all-volunteer military, it would reinsert TNI and its values into the lives of ordinary citizens. So far, the plan has not taken off because of substantial opposition from civilian groups, pointing to the very loss of military influence in society that the idea for a reserve army was designed to overcome.

The decline of military power after 2001: explanatory propositions

Despite continued problems, the extent to which the armed forces have been extracted from politics, the economy, domestic security, and society after 2001 is remarkable. Indonesian democracy has performed far better than most observers had expected when it was launched in 1998, and the military has been sidelined much more quickly and comprehensively than even the greatest optimists had predicted. As other chapters in this volume demonstrate, Indonesia's consolidation occurred against the background of contrary developments in Southeast Asia – the involvement of the Philippine armed forces in electoral manipulations in 2004, the

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military coup in Thailand in 2006, and the crackdown of the Burmese protests in 2008 (Chambers and Croissant 2010). Hence, exploring the reasons for the decline in military influence in Indonesia becomes not only empirically relevant, but also highly valuable in comparative terms. In order to identify the main factors in TNI's loss of influence, this section tests four key propositions that are often used in the scholarly literature to explain the level of military intervention in political, economic, and social affairs: historical legacies, the quality of civilian governance and leadership, internal military developments, and international factors (Mietzner 2009: 1–34).

In terms of *historical legacies*, post-1998 Indonesia was confronted with a number of structural predispositions that were unsupportive of entrenching democracy and sidelining the military. Indonesia's only previous experiment with democracy had failed badly in the 1950s, and four successive decades of authoritarian rule had institutionalized military participation in politics and society. That Indonesia was able to shake off the heavy burden of this historical legacy so swiftly suggests that path dependence theories may not be as suitable to explicate such cases as is often assumed (Croissant, Kühn, Chambers, Wolf, and Völkel 2010). To be sure, the military's ideology, territorial command structure, and self-financing practices are important remnants of the past, but they have not led to the failure of democracy and renewed military rule. In a very ironic twist, the extremely difficult legacy of authoritarianism and military hegemony may have actually served to support the introduction and continued defense of democracy. When Indonesia's political elite debated crucial constitutional amendments in 2001 and 2002, it was the dreadful image of failure and a possible return to authoritarian, military-dominated rule that forced civilian leaders to reach a breakthrough agreement on political change. In these discussions, the memory of similar debates on constitutional reform between 1956 and 1959 was omnipresent. The failure of those deliberations had paved the way for the rise of autocratic rule, sidelining political parties and other key civilian groups for 40 years. Thus, the collective determination to prevent history from repeating itself was arguably the most important historical legacy that drove the military's extraction from politics after 2001.

The *quality of civilian governance and leadership* is another factor often advanced to explain the level of military interference in politics. In many cases in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, militaries have used weaknesses in civilian governance to offer themselves as better alternatives (Alagappa 2001). These weaknesses may relate to heavy fragmentation of the elite, failure to deliver economic growth, or inability to control large-scale conflict. In Indonesia's early post-authoritarian transition, many of these features were present, and the military's intervention in politics was consequently extensive. After 2004, however, the civilian polity stabilized. A major precondition for this improvement was the endorsement of the constitutional amendments mentioned above. This package of political reforms addressed many of the shortcomings of the experimental polity in place between 1998 and 2002, and provided a much clearer set of rules for inter-elite competition (Crouch 2010). The military had opposed the reforms, and

proposed returning to the 1945 constitution instead. Written in haste shortly before independence and therefore containing more loopholes than paragraphs, the 1945 constitution had been misused by Sukarno, Suharto, and the military to justify their various roles in non-democratic rule. Accordingly, restoring this constitution in 2002 would have offered opportunities for TNI to restrengthen its influence on the political process. But the civilian elite saw through these motivations and decided to ignore the military's stance on the constitutional amendments. In a rare demonstration of intra-civilian consensus, the reform package passed and subsequently formed the foundation for a more effective and predictable polity.

One important element in stabilizing civilian leadership in post-2004 Indonesia was its ability to deliver continued economic growth. While economists (and ordinary Indonesians) believe that the country's GDP would have to grow at much higher rates in order to absorb the rapidly expanding labor force, growth levels have been sufficient to prevent the citizenry from questioning the effectiveness of the democratic system. Between 2000 and 2004, the economy grew by an average of 4.5 percent each year; by contrast, GDP expanded by 6 percent per annum in the 2004–8 period (Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs 2008: 2). Significantly, Indonesia had one of the highest economic growth rates during the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 and 2009, and it recorded an expansion of 6.2 percent in the second quarter of 2010.[11] As a result, poverty levels declined, from 19.4 percent in 2000 to 16.6 percent in 2004 and 13.3 percent in March 2010.[12] At the same time, per capita GDP increased from US$ 771 in 2001 to US$ 1,187 in 2004 and US$ 2,349 in 2009 (World Bank 2010)[13]. These economic statistics do not indicate a 'boom' that could rival that of China or other economic powerhouses in the region, but they have consolidated satisfaction levels with the existing political system. In early 2010, 75 percent of respondents in an opinion survey stated that whatever its shortcomings, democracy was still the best political system for Indonesia (LSI 2010). Not coincidentally, that was around the same number of respondents (71 percent) that described their economic situations as better or around the same if compared to the previous year, with only 21 percent claiming that it had become worse (LSI 2010).

The existing democratic system has also succeeded in restoring stable security conditions in the archipelago. With the exception of the Papua problem, most separatist and communal conflicts were resolved by 2005 through effective security measures and political negotiations. In February 2002, then Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and then Coordinating Minister for Social Welfare, Jusuf Kalla, presided over the signing of a peace accord that ended the worst phase of the religious violence in Maluku. Two years later, the pair became president and vice-president of Indonesia, and began negotiations to settle the Aceh conflict, which had cost more than 10,000 lives since the mid-1970s (Morfit 2007). Contradicting the pessimism of most observers, Yudhoyono and Kalla managed to sign a peace agreement with GAM in August 2005 and, even more importantly, make the arrangement work in subsequent years. The resolution of the Aceh conflict was arguably the most significant milestone in Indonesian civil–military relations since Suharto's fall. First and

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foremost, it proved that it was possible for civilian governments to rein in the military over a security issue that was vital to its institutional and ideological interests. Moreover, it sidelined the military from one of its last remaining strongholds, in which it had run an effective shadow government, raised funds from the lucrative conflict economy, and committed abuses without the fear of public scrutiny. In early 2010, 81 percent of Indonesians rated security conditions in the country as 'good' or 'very good' (LSI 2010), neutralizing claims by conservative politicians and military leaders that only iron-fisted, autocratic rule can maintain order in such a religiously, ethnically, and politically heterogeneous state.

While the institutional design of the post-2004 polity was crucial in its success, the role of individual leadership was at least as critical. Each of the four post-Suharto presidencies can be categorized as highly distinctive periods of governance, suggesting that personal agency has played a much larger role in shaping Indonesian politics than proponents of structuralist approaches of explanation are prepared to concede. To begin with, Habibie's presidency was marred by his lack of legitimacy, making him vulnerable to and ultimately dependent on the military. Wahid, for his part, destabilized the post-authoritarian polity through his erratic actions, political belligerence, and disregard for proper systems of governance. By contrast, Megawati restored stability to the state and government, but relied too heavily on the military to resolve the ongoing problems in Aceh and Papua. The consolidation of Indonesian democracy thus only began with Yudhoyono's accession to power in 2004. While the new president could operate within an improved political framework, he also possessed a level of legitimacy, experience, and interest in non-violent conflict resolution that none of his predecessors had exhibited. For all his faults (he has often been described as indecisive and more interested in rhetoric than action), Yudhoyono has managed to strike a careful balance between upholding democratic governance, securing economic growth, and maintaining stable security conditions (Tomsa 2010). Most importantly, he has achieved this without alienating his political opponents – even by his fiercest rivals, Yudhoyono has been viewed as decent and well-meaning. Hence, Yudhoyono avoided the very polarization of the political system that had occurred in Thailand under Thaksin and the Philippines under Arroyo, with disastrous consequences for the civil–military relations of both countries.

The third factor frequently highlighted as being decisive in determining the level of military intervention in politics is related to *internal dynamics in the armed forces*. Most influential in this school of thought has been Samuel Huntington (1957), who submitted that professional militaries tend to stay out of politics while unprofessional soldiers seek to interfere in it. In the Indonesian case, however, this model cannot explain why TNI's political influence has declined since 2001. There is very little evidence that Indonesia's military has been more professional under Yudhoyono than it was during the New Order. Quite to the contrary, TNI has continued to operate with outdated equipment, antiquated doctrines, and inefficient management systems. In September 2009, the ministry of defense announced that only 62 percent of the army's weaponry, 17 percent of all warships, and 31 percent of all TNI planes were operational.[14] While the government has declared that some

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of this equipment will be gradually replaced, there are no plans for a comprehensive technological renewal of the armed forces that could lead to an outpouring of professional pride in TNI's ranks. Similarly, the territorial command structure, which was conceptualized in the 1940s and institutionalized in the 1950s, has remained in place, making it impossible for TNI officers to enter into a serious professional competition with its more modern counterparts in Asia. Ideologically, many soldiers still subscribe to notions of military supremacy and privately criticize civilian leadership as incompetent and divisive. It seems, therefore, that the absence of a credible TNI challenge to civilian domination since the mid-2000s is less related to doctrinal modernization and reinvigorated professionalism within the armed forces, but is the result of effective governance and the overall political stability overseen by Indonesia's non-military elite.

Finally, *international factors* were also peripheral in causing the decrease in TNI influence after 2001. In fact, most international developments in that period worked against the domestic trend of TNI's marginalization. For instance, the US sought TNI's renewed cooperation in counter-terrorism campaigns after the events of 11 September 2001, thus diminishing its reform pressure on Indonesia's military (Mietzner 2002). The sanctions imposed on TNI after the East Timor carnage in 1999 were largely lifted in 2005, and in 2010 Washington even restored its ties with the notorious Special Forces. This softening of the US position was not only a result of its new preoccupation with the War on Terror, however. It was also triggered by the growing awareness that the embargo had been counterproductive, driving TNI into a closer relationship with Russia, China, and Eastern European countries. Since 2003, Indonesia had bought its new fighter jets from Russia instead of the US, deeply concerning Washington over its loss of strategic influence on Jakarta. Moreover, the weight of US commentary on human rights abuses of other militaries has declined drastically since the early 2000s, with Washington's own troops committing violations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and with US administrations tolerating military coups in Pakistan in 1999 and Thailand in 2006. Beyond the reduced pressure by the US, there were also few regional factors that impacted on the dynamics of Indonesia's civil–military relations in the post-2001 polity. With its principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) remained a negligible influence. Having a military dictatorship as a member (Burma) and accepting the Thai junta in 2006, ASEAN has hardly been in a position to coerce other nations into military reforms (Weatherbee 2008).

With historical legacies, internal military developments, and international influences only playing a marginal role in the decline of TNI's political influence after 2001, the quality of civilian governance and leadership emerges as the most consequential factor behind this trend. Indeed, TNI's interference in politics decreased not as a result of wide-ranging reforms to the military's internal structures and doctrines, but as a by-effect of strengthened civilian institutions, stable governance, and measured political leadership. Yudhoyono has established firm yet highly personalized control over TNI, filling key positions with loyalists who have forced the military to toe the government line and refrain from independent political

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operations. Given the failures of the Habibie, Wahid, and Megawati governments to achieve a similar outcome during their periods, it is evident that Yudhoyono's individual leadership was crucial. On a more general level, the collective political attitudes of the civilian elite have also been important. While often (and correctly) criticized as corrupt and self-indulgent, the post-2001 elite has largely played by the rules of the democratic system and thus denied the military the chance of a comeback (MacIntyre and Ramage 2008). There have been no noteworthy extra-constitutional movements to replace the incumbent government and polity, with party leaders waiting for their chance at the next elections and, in the meantime, settling political disputes at the Constitutional Court. It is this consolidation of moderate, non-violent competition among Indonesia's main political actors that has ultimately led to the marginalization of the armed forces. While stronger institutions were key to this development, they could not have operated effectively without the willingness of the elite to support them.

Conclusion: TNI and the civilian polity after 2001

The discussion above has demonstrated that after 40 years of deeply entrenched political participation and continued influence in the early post-Suharto transition, the Indonesian military's engagement in politics and society has declined significantly after 2001. TNI's role in legislative and executive institutions has been diminished, its economic significance has shrunk, and its ability to dominate domestic security policies and more general societal debates has been severely weakened. This does not mean that TNI has become irrelevant, however. It has remained an important instrument of coercion for civilian governments to maintain stability, making it necessary for political leaders not to alienate the TNI top brass if they want its ongoing support. As a result, the military has been able to defend some of its most vital interests – the preservation of the territorial command structure, the continuation of at least a few of its enterprises, and protection from legal investigations into past human rights abuses. It is important to note, therefore, that Indonesia has yet to establish the kind of highly institutionalized system of democratic civilian control that is commonplace in Western states. From the perspective of what was realistically possible when Indonesia launched its democratic transition in 1998, however, it has reduced military influence in political and societal affairs much more dramatically than most commentators had expected. This success becomes particularly obvious when compared to the experiences of its Southeast Asian neighbors after 2001, with Burma's military clinging to power, Thailand's army still meddling in politics, Cambodia drifting towards a Suharto-style autocracy, and the Philippines struggling to control destabilizing insurgencies.

After weighing several explanatory propositions, this chapter has identified stable civilian governance and leadership as the most important cause for TNI's loss of influence. To be sure, such a finding has very mixed implications for Indonesia and the scholarship of civil–military relations. On the one hand, it suggests that countries emerging from decades of authoritarian rule can overcome

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the challenges posed by historical legacies if political leadership is effective and considered. In other words, a country's structural predispositions do not necessarily preclude it from achieving political reform and leaving the path of its predicted transition outcome (Croissant, Kühn, Chambers, Wolf, and Völkel 2010). In Indonesia's case, the unchanged territorial command system, ideological prejudices in the officer corps, and decades of military self-financing practices ultimately did not prevent the emergence of a functioning democracy and economy. Hence, as long as civilians remain united in their uncompromising opposition to military interference in politics, and as long as the main political players genuinely endorse democracy as the only game in town, even the most difficult historical heritage can serve as the foundation for a reasonably healthy post-authoritarian polity. Subsequently, continued economic growth, elite consensus on fundamental policy decisions, and moderate, non-belligerent political competition can sustain the democratic system and keep the military in check.

But the diagnosis of a direct link between the quality of civilian leadership and the level of military intervention in politics has significant downsides as well. With the exclusion of the armed forces from the political arena largely depending on the capability of individual civilian leaders to provide stable governance and economic growth, a change in leadership or a significant decline in the government's performance could lead to a reinvigoration of the military's role. In Indonesia, the institutional control regime over the TNI has not matured to an extent that it would be independent of fluctuations in day-to-day politics. Yudhoyono's successes in containing the military's ambitions were mostly the result of his personal intra-TNI networking and his aptitude to maintain political stability by carefully balancing all existing parties and societal forces. There is no guarantee that Yudhoyono's successor will be able to achieve the same feat. In the same vein, a sudden drop in economic growth – whether triggered by external or internal events – could undermine the very stability upon which the military's political restraint under Yudhoyono has rested. In short, the marginalization of the armed forces from Indonesian politics is not irreversible. In times of a severe political or economic crisis (for instance, a severely disputed election or a significant rise in inflation, unemployment, and poverty), TNI could use its intact territorial command system as a logistical vehicle for political intervention. One doesn't have to go far to find historical precedents for this possibility: in Thailand, the military staged a coup in 2006 after almost 15 years of political abstinence. While such a scenario looked unlikely to occur in Indonesia at the time of writing, the country's dependence on quality leadership and continued economic growth has made it vulnerable to the uncertainties associated with the post-Yudhoyono transition in the years ahead.

Notes

1 The DPR is Indonesia's parliament, while the MPR has the authority to change the constitution and to inaugurate and impeach the president.
2 In 2010, only the governors of Central Java, Central Sulawesi, and West Papua were retired military officers. The other 29 governors had civilian backgrounds.

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3 Out of the 12 members of parliament with a military background, 9 belonged to the PD caucus. The other three were members of PDIP.
4 Interview with Rizal Sukma, the executive director of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Jakarta, 29 September 2010.
5 Interview with former Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono, Jakarta, 19 May 2010.
6 This information is included in the company's filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission. See Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc., '2009 Form 10-K', available online at http://www.fcx.com
7 Interview with former Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono, Jakarta, 19 May 2010.
8 In 2010, Yudhoyono established the National Anti-Terrorism Agency (*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme*, BNPT). Some observers believed that the BNPT was designed to give TNI a role in counter-terrorism, but at the time of writing this was far from certain. Based on the decree that established the BNPT, the agency brings together a wide range of government departments and institutions for coordination purposes.
9 'Pukul Wartawan, Dandim Karanganyar Siap Diproses Hukum', *Detik.com*, 7 September 2010.
10 'RUU Komponen Candangan Tidak Perlu', *Media Indonesia*, 1 August 2010.
11 'Indonesia Posts 6.2 pct Growth in Second Quarter', *AFP*, 4 August 2010.
12 'Megawati Pesimis Target Angka Kemiskinan Terpenuhi', *Antara*, 31 January 2008; see also BPS (2010: 76).
13 If purchasing power parity is taken into account, Indonesia's per capita GDP (PPP) increased from US$ 2,405 in 2000 to US$ 2,976 in 2004 and US $4,149 in 2009 (ADB 2010: 158).
14 'Gawat, Pemeliharaan Senjata TNI Model Kanibal', *Tempo Interaktif*, 15 September 2009.

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8 The armed forces and politics in Singapore

The persistence of civil–military fusion

Tan Tai Yong

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At a public event in Singapore in September 2009, Lee Kuan Yew – the country's first prime minister and then minister mentor – was asked if he would mobilize the army 'in the event of a serious threat of a freak election' that could throw out the ruling Peoples' Action Party (PAP). He gave a long reply, but the gist of his answer was that there was no likelihood of military intervention as the political system in Singapore was sufficiently strong and mature to 'allow fundamental change by consent'.[1] While definitely not indicating sympathy for imminent regime change, Lee's reply underlined the absence of a political role for the military in Singapore, and emphasized that military intervention – never an issue in the country's history – was a highly unlikely scenario for the future. Whereas Singapore has probably 'the most impressive military force in contemporary Southeast Asia' (Huxley 2000: 28), it is also one of its least political; civilian rule remains supreme and has never been questioned or challenged by an apolitical military. Yet, in a rather curious paradox, the military features prominently in national priorities (as indicated by its consistently sizeable budget) as well as the social consciousness of most Singaporeans. How do we explain this phenomenon?

The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) was established in 1965 as an integral part of the state-building project of independent Singapore. By introducing mandatory national military service for male citizens two years later, the military, in addition to its function as a defense force, was clearly conceived and designed as an institution for nation-building as well. Consequently, the relationship between military, state, and society in Singapore has been an intimate one. In an earlier essay (Tan 2001a), I explained how the military was built as a key element of the post-colonial state in Singapore. This has resulted in what I had termed 'civil–military fusion' in which the SAF, while remaining at its core a highly professional military, is at the same time deeply wedded to the state through tight structural links with the country's political and administrative edifice. Similarly, the SAF has deep and entrenched roots in society at large by being a largely conscript-based force. This structural fusion, which the SAF leaders view as appropriate and satisfactory, has made the SAF 'one of the least politically-oriented national military forces in Southeast Asia' (Huxley 1993: 1).

Civil–military relations in Singapore have remained largely constant since the 1960s, and the observation that 'the most striking feature of the Singapore scene

[*vis-à-vis* civil–military relations] is the undisputed predominance of the civilian sector over the military' (Chan 1985: 136) also remains valid to this day. Although the military in Singapore has a nation-building purpose in addition to its defense functions, it has never assumed a political or praetorian role in the domestic realm. Yet, because of the closeness between the military and civilian leaderships – and the fact that the current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was a brigadier general and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Teo Chee Hean a former rear admiral in the SAF – the distinction between the military and the state does not always appear to be clear-cut and remains puzzling to some. It has sometimes been pointed out that, with its large national service army, considerable defense budget, and a fairly large number of former generals in the cabinet and other key administrative appointments, the military has, in effect, occupied a preponderant position in the polity of Singapore (Tan 2001b). Has the military, therefore, assumed a much larger and profound impact on domestic politics than its professional and apolitical profile would suggest? In order to address this question, this chapter will revisit arguments I developed in my 2001 essay. In the first section, the discussion will focus on the historical evolution of the SAF. Second, the focus will turn to the structural integration of the SAF and the state in Singapore, pointing to the main areas in which civilian and military spheres have merged. The third part emphasizes the status of the SAF as a citizen army, which is largely based on Singapore's unique system of national service conscription. Finally, the chapter discusses whether the rise of former military officers in Singapore's political hierarchy has left its mark on the character of the polity as a whole, concentrating in particular on possible repercussions of Lee Hsien Loong's appointment as prime minister in 2004.

In reviewing the political role of the armed forces in Singapore, this chapter reemphasizes the relevance of the model of civil–military fusion. In this model, the military is not an independent or oppositional component outside the civilian polity, but forms an integral part of the administrative structure. The upshot is a military establishment that does not possess its own political or ideological ambitions, but instead identifies fully with the values, interests, and national goals set by the civilian government (Khong 1995: 119). In such a setting, the line that has traditionally separated the military from the civilian leadership becomes irrelevant as all parts of the state operate within a framework of national objectives and priorities defined by the country's political elite. All this makes 'objective civilian control' (Huntington 1957: 83–4) – where the military is regarded as an entity whose political power could be minimized by rendering it more professional – inapplicable in the Singapore case.

Viewed from the fusion perspective, Singapore does not have to confront the classic civil–military dilemma that the very instrument of force the state designed for its protection could eventually turn against its creator. This is because the defense of Singapore has always been the collective responsibility of the entire nation, not just the SAF. With a dominant political party in power since independence and the absence of security threats that would have necessitated major military interventions, the scenario of a gradual erosion of civilian control over the military – or

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the emergence of an aggressive SAF establishment that does not believe in being apolitical – has never arisen. While Singapore has had to face a complex security environment in the period after 11 September 2001, it has stuck consistently to its long-held, civilian-led policy of diplomacy and deterrence.[2] Stable political structures and a sustained period of peace and economic growth have also ensured that the military in Singapore continues to be firmly integrated with the agenda of the civilian state. Even as the SAF develops into what Singapore's defense establishment has since 2008 termed a 'third generation' armed force with formidable hi-tech battle capabilities (Jane's Defence Weekly 2010), it has not strained from civilian control. Indeed, in response to the rising threat of transnational terrorism and other challenges such as epidemics, the civilian coordination and oversight of the security agencies has increased significantly since 2001. The National Security Coordination Secretariat within the Prime Minister's Office, headed by a senior civil servant, has played a major role in this coordination (National Security Coordination Secretariat 2006). Evidently, the armed forces have become part of a complex security network that ultimately remains controlled by Singapore's civilian state elite.

Evolution of the Singapore Armed Forces

The military in Singapore is a creation of the post-colonial state. Unlike the armed forces in neighboring Indonesia, Vietnam, and Burma, the SAF did not precede the emergence of an independent nation-state. In the absence of local armies or militias, the defense of colonial Singapore was left to British troops stationed in the island. Herein is a remarkable paradox: the military had never featured prominently in Singapore's history despite the fact that for a long period the island's value as a colony largely lay in its potential as a military base serving British strategic interests east of the Suez. In the 1920s, for example, the British decided to build a naval base in Singapore to protect their trade routes and defend their colonies in the East. With its extensive military facilities, including several military airfields and a dry dock that could service the largest ships in the world, the colony came to be known as Fortress Singapore. But while a fairly extensive military edifice had been erected by the British by the early twentieth century, the military remained a colonial superstructure that never sank roots into the local, mainly immigrant society.

Attempts at building up a local armed force, mostly for the purpose of performing internal security functions, were sporadic. In 1854, a Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps had been established to assist the police in dealing with communal riots. This unit was later enlarged to include Eurasian, Malay, and Chinese infantry companies and was renamed the Singapore Volunteer Force. Right up to the 1950s, however, local Chinese involvement in the military was extremely limited, and enlistees were mainly from the minority Malay, Indian, and Eurasian communities (Chiang 1990: 28–9). For cultural and other reasons, the Chinese steered clear of the military, and later initiatives to conscript them into the army were met with fierce resistance (Bedlington 1981; Peled 1994). An attempt by the British colonial

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government to pass a national service ordinance and introduce the concept of national conscription in Singapore in 1952 attracted strong protests and demonstrations from Chinese school students (Chan 1985: 140). Although the ordinance managed to enlist 400 young men in its first enlistment exercise, the effort to impose national service in the 1950s was curtailed because of its unpopularity with the mainly Chinese population of Singapore.

Consequently, outside of a small volunteer force, Singapore never had an indigenous military force of any significance prior to independence. Defense had always been in the hands of an external power: first with the British, when Singapore was a colony, and later with Kuala Lumpur when Singapore was part of Malaysia between 1963 and 1965. Although two infantry regiments had been raised in Singapore in the late 1950s, primarily for internal security purposes, both had a high percentage of Malay personnel from the peninsula and were merged into the Malaysian Armed Forces when Singapore became part of Malaysia (Mayerchak 1986: 172). Thus it was obvious that when Singapore became independent, it had little local military tradition or establishment to speak of. In August 1965, after separating from Malaysia, the new state of Singapore inherited only a rudimentary defense force, comprising two infantry battalions and a navy of two wooden-hulled ships (Hanna 1964).

The emergence and subsequent development of the SAF was largely driven by the PAP's preoccupation with state-building in post-1965 Singapore. After its sudden expulsion from Malaysia, the survival of Singapore as an independent state became the dominating concern that shaped almost all of the government's policies (Chua 1997). Historical memories – mainly its acrimonious breakup with Malaysia – as well as certain geostrategic realities – a tiny, predominantly Chinese state in a Malay/Muslim sea – heightened the country's sense of vulnerability. Although Singapore has never faced territorial aggression from any of its neighbors since independence, there has been no let-up in the government's concern over the security of the country. In 1982, at a National Day speech, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stated that his greatest concern was to 'make the young more conscious of security'.[3] Not long after, then Defense Minister Goh Chok Tong, who later served as prime minister from 1990 to 2004, voiced similar sentiments that 'conflict, confrontation and war is the order of the day and peace and stability is the exception'.[4] In 2005, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong underscored this long-held commitment by reminding Singaporeans, once again, that despite many years of peace the country must remain vigilant against threats to its security.[5] The public is constantly told by the government that order is fragile and that, as a small state, Singapore has to be prepared for unexpected threats and crises. References are often made to Sri Lanka, Lebanon, and Kuwait as examples of the dangers – and indeed tragedy – that await small states that have gone soft on security. In state-wide national education programs, students and civil servants are also regularly reminded that Singapore's survival and success depended ultimately on security.

The government has thus proceeded on the principle that Singapore, though small, cannot afford to be pushed around. And because it cannot expect bigger

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powers to come to its rescue if its security is threatened, the country must be able to defend itself, especially against the predatory intentions of bigger powers. In other words, in order to survive in an unfriendly world, a small, weak, and exposed Singapore must become 'robust, rugged, and self-reliant', particularly in its defense capability (Hanna 1973: 1). This has since remained a cardinal principle of the state as far as defense is concerned, and it explains why the government has remained so committed to an unrelenting build-up of the armed forces. Throughout the 2000s, defense expenditure has consistently consumed a significant portion of the national budget each year (averaging 4.5 to 5 percent of GDP), enabling the SAF to develop into a sophisticated, hi-tech force. In explaining the defense spending of S$ 11.4 billion (US$ 9.1 billion) in the 2009 Budget, Defense Minister Teo Chee Hean argued that Singapore could not afford to adopt a 'feast and famine' approach to defense spending and that a steady budget was necessary to maintain the operational readiness of the armed forces (Ong 2010: 2) From Table 8.1, it is evident that the commitment to a strong military has been a consistent mantra of the Singapore government, particularly in the post-2001 security environment.

However, self-reliance in defense was sought not only for self-esteem and national prestige; it was also regarded as a necessary precondition for Singapore's participation in regional military alliances. Although Singapore had participated in a loose military pact known as the Five Power Defense Arrangement (signed in 1971 with Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia), it nonetheless adopted the attitude that collective security arrangements would work only when there was reciprocity (Chin 1974). Singapore had to be prepared to give as much as it received. Hence, Singapore had to quickly build a credible defense force with the ability to inflict considerable damage on any aggressor (Chin 1987). To cynics who claimed that large defense budgets were a waste of resources because whatever armed forces the tiny state could muster would be no match for a large, determined power, the Singapore government responded by describing its defense posture as analogous to that of the poison shrimp – the predator who swallows the shrimp

Table 8.1 Singapore's defense expenditure, 2001–9

Financial year	*Defense expenditure (billion)**
2001	7.8
2002	8.2
2003	8.3
2004	8.6
2005	9.3
2006	10.0
2007	10.6
2008	10.8
2009	11.4

Source: Ministry of Finance Budget Archives, Singapore

Note:

*Singapore dollars

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will end up paying a high cost for its action. The poison shrimp strategy, which survived into the 1980s, has since been replaced with a 'prevail and win' strategy.[6] The military believes that it now possesses the military capability to strike far from the island state as a form of 'forward defense'. This forward approach is premised on Singapore's lack of a hinterland (and therefore strategic depth), and the government's conviction that it could not afford to concede any of its territory to an aggressor in the hope of regaining it later.

A related but fundamental reason for the emphasis on defense was the concern that unless the government was able to demonstrate its ability to defend itself against potential enemies, it would not be able to inspire the confidence of foreign investors. In the government's perspective, a credible military was not merely necessary as a national security force or a status symbol for independent nationhood; in the particular case of Singapore, it was an imperative for the country's economic survival. In the late 1970s, when communist regimes held sway in Indochina, Goh Keng Swee, the architect of the SAF, observed that the PAP government's decision to build a national armed force had been vindicated: 'If that decision [to build a military force] had not been taken, Singapore would be in a weak, unprepared state. The confidence of businessmen and investors would be shaken beyond repair [and] the prosperity that we have achieved over the decade would crumble overnight' (Josey 1980: 157). Reflecting this emphasis on economic sustenance, the establishment of the armed forces was not entrusted to military men; the small port-city had no local military tradition or expertise to which the government could turn. Instead, the task was given to a politician-bureaucrat whose only soldiering experience was a stint spent as a corporal in the Singapore Volunteer Corps. An economist with a doctorate from the London School of Economics, Goh Keng Swee was finance minister of Singapore's first cabinet. Under his leadership, the SAF went through its nascent and formative years, which were marked by the needs and concerns of state formation at that time.

The military and the state

The integration of the armed forces into the state structure is mirrored in the overall set-up of the military establishment in Singapore. The SAF is part of an elaborate, civilian-led defense structure that is tightly integrated for the purpose of a unified command system and optimal resource utilization. Together with a number of other security agencies and institutions, the SAF operates under the firm control of the Ministry of Defense (MINDEF), which is headed by a civilian minister. Through a coordinated process led by the minister, senior civil servants, and the top military brass, MINDEF decides on all matters relating to the military, including budget allocation. Senior civil servants who are responsible for overall coordination of defense and security as well as technology and development head the executive arm of MINDEF. The three main departments in MINDEF that deal directly with the military – manpower, technology, and intelligence – are also headed by civilians, though some have been former military officers. Currently, the

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head civil servant in the ministry (known as the permanent secretary) oversees the work of three functional groups: the Defense Policy Group, which is responsible for formulating and coordinating defense relations, information, and security; the Defense Administration Group, which looks after the manpower, financial, and administration aspects of MINDEF and the SAF; and the Technology Group, which incorporates the Defense Science and Technology Agency and provides the technological wherewithal to support the armed forces. Moreover, a Future Systems Directorate has been created in February 2003 to plan for future scenarios that the SAF might have to contend with. Significantly, all these groups are dominated by civilians and function as non-uniformed administrative departments outside the armed forces.

Civilian control of the military has been further facilitated by the establishment of the Armed Forces Council (AFC), through an Act of Parliament in 1972, as the 'highest policy making body which oversees the administration of the armed forces' (Huxley 2000: 81). The Council is headed by the minister of defense and includes the permanent secretaries of MINDEF, chief of defense force, the chiefs of the army, air force, and navy, and others that may be appointed by the president. The highest decision-making body on security and military matters is the Defense Council, chaired by the prime minister and comprising a small number of senior cabinet members. Military officers do not have a permanent seat in the Defense Council and are represented only in an advisory capacity. Through this structure, all matters relating to national security with political and diplomatic implications are deliberated and decided by the political and administrative elites. Consequently, the SAF's role is merely to execute national security and defense policies made at a higher level by the civilian leadership.

Independent action on the part of the SAF is also made impossible by the fact that the military does not possess its own source of income. As with other branches of the state apparatus, MINDEF is completely dependent on the government for its annual budget. Unlike in countries where the military exerts influence on the size of the defense budget by defining existing and future threat perceptions, the Singapore government decided early on that defense spending had to be pegged at a fixed proportion of gross domestic product (GDP). Thus, although military spending has traditionally taken up a large portion of the national budget (normally above 20 percent), its annual allocation does not, as a policy, exceed 6 percent of the GDP. By ensuring that defense expenditures are linked to the state of the economy, the government has been able to guarantee that they will not expand to the detriment of other areas of national development.

Pegging the defense expenditure to a fixed percentage of the GDP also offers an added advantage: the country does not have to name its enemies to justify the military budget. The government has always insisted that Singapore's defense build-up is based not on a particular threat, but on a doctrine to prevent threats from arising (Yeo 1992). Nonetheless, it has been pointed out that 'Singapore defense policy evinces an overriding concern with the deterrence of Malaysia' (Huxley 1991: 204). Some authors, on the other hand, have insisted that the case may not be that obvious (Young and Djiwandono 1988). While Singapore–Malaysia relations

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have had their rocky patches (their territorial dispute over the small islets of Pedra Branca and Middle Rock was only resolved by the International Court of Justice in 2008), the proximity of the two countries to each other makes their defense indivisible – even turning them into 'natural defense allies' (Tan 1999: 456). Whatever the threat perception may be, because the SAF is given a fixed budget, it is not tempted to demonize Malaysia or any of its neighbors as aggressors – removing the need for the top military brass to make the enemy appear more menacing in order to get more money.

While the military budget has been placed under the careful scrutiny and control of the civilian leadership, the SAF has not been deprived of the necessary resources to constantly adapt to the evolving security landscape. In its transformation into a 'Third Generation' force, the SAF has leveraged on high technology to create advanced networks, unmanned systems, and weapon systems for precision strikes. Accordingly, its defense doctrine has shifted from 'poison shrimp' to forward defense, implying confidence in its capacity to prevail in military engagements. This ongoing technological and strategic innovation has been facilitated by a well-developed defense–industrial complex in Singapore. Mindful of its limitations in the size of its armed forces, the government has long been convinced of the need to exploit technology as a force multiplier. Defense technology, however, is not controlled or managed by the SAF alone, but in partnership with two other major actors, the MINDEF's Defense Science and Technology Agency and the local defense industrial base, headed by the transnational, government-linked Singapore Technologies Group. Through this relationship, MINDEF has been able to develop state-of-the-art small arms and military equipment to meet the particular needs of the SAF. This defense–industrial complex offers perhaps one of the clearest manifestations of civil–military fusion in Singapore. As a local military analyst has pointed out, 'the burgeoning defense industrial complex … which supports the SAF's operational readiness … also contributes to the national cause of creating a society with a broad technological base' (Da Cunha 1999: 462). Thus, defense and national development needs are closely integrated and not put at odds against each other. Rather than draining the country's resources, the defense industry has contributed to national economic growth through its non-military business. Indeed, the spillovers of rises in defense budgets in terms of employment generation in the defense-related industries have made such budgetary increments politically viable.

Whereas structural and budgetary provisions ensure that the SAF functions in accordance with the overall dictates of the political leadership, the total defense concept, the keystone of Singapore's security strategy, ensures that the business of defense is not monopolized by the military. In countries where the military plays a dominant role (such as Thailand or Burma), the armed forces often regard themselves as guardians of the national interest. In Singapore, national security is not entrusted to the SAF alone. Since 1984, with the launch of its 'Total Defense' concept, the country has adopted a comprehensive approach to security that is premised on the belief that Singapore can survive a war only if the entire society, and not just the military, is prepared for defense. In this respect, 'Total Defense' encompasses psychological defense, in which the will of the people must be

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galvanized to resist external threats; economic defense, where the country's business and industry must be bolstered to withstand the pressures of a major crisis or war; civil defense, where the civilian population will be prepared to safeguard themselves and their properties in a conflict; and social defense, which emphasizes the building of cohesion in the country's multi-racial society so that the social fabric will not tear asunder in times of crisis. Military defense makes up the fifth pillar of the overall 'Total Defense' strategy. The SAF constitutes the military arm of this strategy, and its role is clearly defined: to deter potential aggressors from attacking Singapore. Significantly, annual campaigns remind citizens that 'Total Defense' is part of everyday life in Singapore. Little wonder then that 97 percent of respondents polled in 2007 believed that 'Total Defense' is important to Singapore's long-term security.[7]

Believing that it is deterrence that allows diplomacy to work effectively, the Singapore government has developed its foreign relations on the foundation of a strong defense force. Diplomacy and deterrence have therefore been the twin pillars of Singapore's defense policy since the 1980s. Singapore has actively supported multi-lateral cooperation efforts that are aimed at constructing a stable security architecture and peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms in the region. Responding to parliamentary questions in February 2008 on Singapore's defense and deterrence diplomacy, Defense Minister Teo explained that 'multi-lateral co-operation' was required 'to counter transnational threats as well as to create a culture of constructive engagement, and peaceful dispute avoidance and resolution'. Accordingly, it was in Singapore's interest to facilitate the development of a regional security architecture that would provide a robust and flexible framework for peace and stability in Asia.[8] Through such an approach, military capability constitutes but one part of an overall security approach, which also entails regional cooperation, bilateral dialogue with neighbors, and confidence-building measures across the Asia-Pacific. In other words, the diplomatic element of Singapore's security strategy highlights the fusion of civilian and military responsibilities under the overall leadership of the political elite.

A citizens' army

One important element in Singapore's fusion of civilian and military spheres has been the preponderance of conscript soldiers in the SAF's rank and file. The SAF currently has over 72,000 personnel on active duty, of which about 35,000 are conscripts. However, the largest component in the SAF's overall troop strength is made up of the estimated 320,000 'operationally ready servicemen' in the reserve force. In 1965, as the government of newly independent Singapore sought to build a self-reliant defense force, it decided on the option of a national service army. Cost was a major consideration. Then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew declared, 'We cannot afford a big army, we will go bankrupt. … We have 2,000 men in two regiments and they cost $20 million a year. This is not the way for us. We must depend on volunteers … weekend soldiers.'[9] Two years later, in 1967, national service was implemented and every able-bodied male citizen aged 18 was required

by law to join the army for between two and two and a half years of full-time military training and service. Upon completion of full-time national service, the soldiers would be deemed operationally ready and be required to attend training camp for 10 to 14 days each year. By law, every male citizen is obliged to perform national service until he is 40 or 50 years old, depending on his rank. With the implementation of national service, the SAF became a citizens' army of conscripts, trained and led by a small core of professional soldiers.

At first, the decision to introduce national service did not go down well with the people of Singapore, particularly with Chinese parents who believed that 'good sons do not become soldiers, just as good iron is not used to make nails'. Anxious parents tried desperately to get their sons out of national service, especially when rumors started circulating in the early 1970s of ill treatment in the army as well as government plans to send enlisted men to Vietnam. These early problems notwithstanding, the Singapore government was convinced that national service suited the country in a number of ways. First, it enabled Singapore to establish a fairly sizable defense force in a short period of time. Second, it was the most economical way of establishing an army, given the new state's limited resources, including in manpower. With a conscript army built around reservists who would maintain their civilian jobs, the country could have a sizable defense force without draining the work force. And third, the state would not have to demobilize a huge standing force, with all its social and political implications, should the economy be unable to support it.

Apart from serving the country's defense needs, national service was also expected to function as an institution integrating disparate ethnic groups through the common experience of military training (Government of Singapore 1969). Goh Keng Swee was convinced that 'nothing creates loyalty and national consciousness more thoroughly than participation in defence … [and] nation-building aspects will be more significant if its participation is spread over all levels of society' (Goh 1973). By having to live, train, and spend time together, the young men of Singapore, at one of the most impressionable times in their lives, would share an experience, it was hoped, that would bridge economic, cultural, religious, ethnic, and language differences (Nair 1994: 15). At this stage, no public study has yet been done to assess the full impact of national service on the outlook of young Singaporeans, but anecdotal evidence suggests that conscription has indeed performed a nation-building task by creating a collective consciousness that would ultimately lead to national identity. It is perhaps in recognition of these nation-building functions that the SAF's mission has always been focused clearly on external defense. Citizen armies can easily be galvanized against an external threat but are of questionable utility for suppressing domestic disturbances. Thus, unlike a number of other armed forces in Southeast Asia, the SAF has largely been divested of any significant internal security role.

National service has not only contributed substantially to the expansion of Singapore's defense capability; it has had an enormous impact as well on the development of the SAF as a military institution. As a citizens' army, the SAF has had to incorporate a decidedly civilian culture into an institution that by tradition

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tends to be rigid and hierarchical. Training procedures, for instance, are constantly reviewed with the aim of adapting to the demands of an armed force that draws its strength from civilians. In the past, military training placed emphasis on traditional preoccupations with spit-and-polish discipline. Confronted with increasingly educated and socially diverse national servicemen, however, today's SAF has had to adopt a people-oriented management approach. No longer is professionalism among national servicemen identified with strict adherence to military norms and traditions; instead, it now involves possessing the requisite knowledge in modern tactics and weaponry to function as soldiers.

At the same time, as an army consisting mostly of ordinary citizens, the SAF has had to grapple with the tension between the political demands of nation-building and the professional demands of a technically sophisticated force. The problem has essentially been resolved in two ways. First, although reservists constitute the bulk of the army, their proportion in the technically specialized navy and airforce is significantly lower. Presently, the air force maintains a regular-to-reserve ratio of 3:7.5, while the navy's ratio is 3:5 (The Military Balance 2009). Second, the SAF, unlike many traditional armies, makes no assumptions about the length of time it takes to train a soldier. Its entire training system is predicated upon the belief that national servicemen are thinking soldiers who understand what is needed of them and will respond more readily to a focused and compressed course of training. This belief has created innovative approaches to training and motivation. For example, in addition to uniforms and other military accoutrements, national service enlistees are now also issued with computer notebooks as part of their training equipment.

The fused civil–military character of the SAF is also reflected in the system of rewards and incentives. Based on the recommendations of government committees, reservists today enjoy benefits that range from tax relief and memberships in recreational and golf clubs to medical aid and insurance. One of the SAF's main responsibilities in this context is the forging of partnerships with employers, who are constantly updated on the contents and requirements of in-camp training. Annual awards are presented to employers who support their staff engaged in national service. All this underlines that the SAF is not simply a professional military establishment, but a national institution that is highly integrated with society.

The influences imposed by a citizens' army continue to leave a strong imprint on the SAF's norms, value system, and doctrines. With more than 80 percent of its troops part-time national servicemen whose interests and inclinations are not closely linked to the military organization, the SAF has never developed a distinct corporate culture. Rather, the military is regarded as an institution in which young Singaporean men complete their rites of passage and then perform their duty as citizens by spending a couple of weeks each year sharpening their military skills as reservists. Soldiering in Singapore is viewed as a national duty; rarely is it motivated by regimental pride. Loyalty to the unit is often built upon personal ties and comradeship rather than institutional devotion. When a reserve battalion gathers for its annual training camp, it is usually the promise of camaraderie that motivates the men and mitigates the disruption and inconveniences they have to

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put up with when they attend training. This lack of corporate identity is perhaps one of the firmest indications that a military coup is highly unlikely to occur in Singapore. Essentially, the SAF is an army of regular 'chiefs' without regular soldiers. Hence, there are simply no clusters of politically motivated soldiers that could form a base for ambitious generals to exploit. Even among the chiefs, constant rotation of duties and short command postings, usually between three and five years in length, prevent the entrenchment of a solid power base.

National service has also forced the SAF to maintain high levels of accountability to the public from which it draws the bulk of its conscripts. For instance, the SAF's status as a citizens' army has led to a situation in which training mishaps and deaths cannot be concealed. Accordingly, such incidents are given coverage in the media and are often the subject of discussions in cyberspace. Where negligence occurs, the guilty parties are subject to military or civil disciplinary actions. In a highly-publicized incident in August 2003, a national serviceman died while he was participating in a combat survival training exercise. Upon investigation, it was found that the soldier died of asphyxia and near-drowning after being submerged in water by his training officers. The officers in question each received a prison sentence of nine months, and the SAF suspended that particular aspect of training immediately after the incident. The minister of defense later issued a ministerial statement in parliament, explaining the situation and apologizing to the serviceman's family and friends.[10]

In fast-moving and economy-driven Singapore, even the professional corps has not been spared the civilianizing effect. 'Occupationalism' has become so prevalent that a military career is regarded more as a job option than a calling. Increasingly, the SAF must resort to monetary incentives and generous scholarships to recruit and retain regular servicemen. To make a career in the armed forces attractive, the SAF portrays itself as a modern, forward-looking institution in which promotions are based on potential, talent, and ability rather than age and seniority. Moreover, salary scales in the armed services have been made largely commensurate with the private sector. Even so, regular officers tend to opt for short-term contracts rather than pensionable service. Although this need not imply that contract servicemen are less professional, it does indicate that a career in the military is no more than a transitory occupation offering a decent income. Indeed, there is a correlation between economic growth and recruitment patterns: military service has been regarded as less attractive during times of economic expansion when jobs are plentiful and wages are high, and vice versa.[11] By the 1990s, in fact, the SAF had listed as one of its major concerns the challenge to attract and retain the best men as regulars.[12] This dilution of soldiering as a career has to a large extent been engendered by MINDEF's insistence that the SAF, to remain a young and vigorous organization, couldn't afford to provide lifelong employment: professional soldiers were expected to leave the force by their mid-to-late forties. This policy has since been altered. With the rapid modernization of the armed forces, the SAF has had to extend the retirement age of its regular officers from 45 to 50, to allow them time to develop the necessary expertise to function in the 'third generation' force. At the same time, greater use

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of technology has led to the need for fewer, but better trained soldiers, and this has resulted in the shortening of the maximum duration of national service from 30 to 24 months in 2004.[13]

Overall, the SAF has matured into a highly developed and sophisticated institution, a hi-tech and tightly-coordinated fighting force. As a mature military organization, the SAF enjoys a high degree of autonomy in its internal and operational matters and, as expected, provides major inputs into the making of national security policy. Nonetheless, civilian control in budgetary and structural terms remains absolute. Although the military has not been tested on battlegrounds, it has sharpened its operational readiness by participating in United Nations-sponsored peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. Since 1991, Singapore soldiers have served in various capacities in peacekeeping missions in Africa, Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, and Europe (Ong 2009). Moreover, the SAF has provided medical and other forms of humanitarian aid to Indonesia and Afghanistan, helping in disaster relief operations (such as the one following the 2004 tsunami in Aceh) and reconstruction work. This participation in oversees relief work and the cooperation with domestic and international civilian bodies to carry out reconstruction operations has led SAF officers to look beyond their core military mission, while allowing the SAF to play a role in Singapore's international diplomacy. From both a domestic and an international perspective, the collaboration between the ministry of foreign affairs and the military in such operations has offered further testimony of Singapore's unique civil–military integration.

Military and politics

When a growing number of high-ranking soldier-scholars made their way into key positions in the civil service and the cabinet in the 1980s and 1990s, some observers suggested that the military was set to assume significant influence at the center of the policymaking arena. This, goes the argument, was due to an insertion of a 'military mindset' into the government decision-making process, potentially giving rise to an excessive emphasis on defense and security considerations or, worse, undue favor towards the military when formulating public policies (Huxley 1995). Moreover, the increasing number of ex-SAF men called upon to serve in politics and the administrative service might lead, it was feared, to the erosion of strong civilian control in the long run. Indeed, the present 21-strong cabinet installed in 2006 has six military alumni, including the prime minister. Several top positions in the various ministries, statutory boards, and government-linked companies are also held by former senior officers of the SAF. This growing presence of former military men in key positions in civilian politics has raised concerns over the SAF's growing political influence. Does the presence of a significant number of SAF officers in the political and administrative apparatus suggest a growing influence of the military in national affairs? And, related to this, will the crossover of military men necessarily lead to an imposition of their military paradigm into politics and policy formation, making the country more hawkish and assertive in relations with its neighbors?

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Although former senior SAF officers have featured prominently in the upper reaches of the political hierarchy in Singapore since the 1980s, this constellation has not led to the militarization of the state. As explained above, the porosity between the military and the state is but a manifestation of the almost symbiotic relationship that has always existed between the civil and military leadership – a nexus arising from the convergence of interests among the Singaporean elite, both inside and outside the military. The influx of soldiers into politics and the bureaucracy should perhaps be seen as a reversal of the process that took place during the early years of Singapore's post-independence history, when civil servants had to be put in uniforms to set up the military establishment. This time around, it is a case of military officers forgoing their uniforms to take on national leadership roles in the state and society in Singapore. The movement of ex-military men into the civilian polity, therefore, merely represents the government's effort to create a common pool of national leaders who can be deployed interchangeably in all institutional fields.

The move of senior military officers into politics has also been a consequence of the internal logic of SAF's recruitment patterns. In a society that has traditionally regarded a military career as unattractive, conscious efforts have to be made to induce talents to the SAF. The prestigious SAF Overseas Scholarship (SAFOS), which has been described as the apex of the SAF talent scouting system, has largely been successful in attracting and retaining talents in the armed forces. In fact, since the scheme was introduced in 1971, the military has been able to establish a near monopoly of the country's top academic achievers. The objective of the scholarships was not limited to recruiting able military leaders, however; it has a larger purpose of grooming national leadership. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, an early recipient of SAFOS, is an example of these scholars who have moved from military to key national leadership positions. The SAF scholarship scheme was further supplemented by Project Wrangler, introduced in 1974, through which promising young officers below the rank of lieutenant colonel were prepared for key staff and command appointments in the SAF in order to preempt a brain drain of talented officers from the military (Chan 1985: 147). High-performing scholar-soldiers were given rapid promotions in the SAF, and by the 1980s many of them – although still in their thirties – had already risen to the top of the military hierarchy. Hence, there was a need to move these men into civil appointments in order to free the bottleneck in the top ranks. Consequently, from the 1980s, many colonels and brigadiers 'retired' from the army to assume new appointments in the public service, statutory boards, and government-linked companies.

The transfer of senior SAF officers into the civil service was further facilitated by a dual career scheme introduced by the government in 1981. This scheme, established to ensure a national circulation of talents, allowed scholar-officers from the SAF to join the administrative service permanently, or to return to the military ranks after a two-year civil service posting.[14] Through this mechanism, a significant number of serving and ex-SAF officers found their way into the upper echelons of the civil sector. This trend of moving senior SAF officers into politics, the civil service, and government-linked companies has continued. Not only is it

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part of the government's pragmatic approach to optimizing the country's talent pool, but it is also an inevitable consequence of the SAF's increasing disinclination to offer lifelong employment. However, the influx of military men into the civilian domain has not led to increasing military dominance; instead, there are indications that the porous boundary between the civilian and military spheres in Singapore may inadvertently dilute the military professional core and prevent the development of a strong institutional identity within the SAF. Indeed, the 'fast-tracking' of officers into the higher echelons of the SAF on the basis of scholarly achievements rather than professional military experience and competence has been criticized by some military observers as a weakness of Singapore's defense system (Walsh 2007).

Although the emergence of a military mindset in Singaporean politics is hardly a threat at the moment, the movement of SAF officers into the higher echelons of the public sector could conceivably lead to a greater inclusion of military considerations in the government's decision-making process. Because former military officers would have spent the formative part of their careers functioning in a particular environment – with its own social paradigm, subculture, jargon, and values – the military experience is bound to impinge on their worldview and value system. Insofar as this worldview is carried into the civilian milieu by both SAF personnel entering political positions and reservists interacting with society, one cannot dismiss the possibility of a proliferation of military values in Singapore's state and society. But while the Singapore government has had an increasing number of former military leaders in its ranks since the 1980s, there has been no overt championing of military corporate concerns in the public realm by these ex-soldiers – except for the consistently held view that a strong armed force is a national necessity. These former military officers, once they had shed their uniforms, have fully embraced their roles as political leaders, not lobbyists for the military's interests. This is perhaps best exemplified by the current prime minister.

It may appear to the casual observer of Singaporean politics that Lee Hsien Loong's appointment as prime minister in August 2004 has placed the political leadership of the country in the hands of a former army general, and that some form of 'militarization' of state and society will inevitably occur as a result. There has, as yet, been no evidence of this. Instead, the new prime minister attempted a gradual opening up of the political space in Singapore, enabling opposition parties and civil society groups to query government policies. Not unexpectedly, most of the criticisms have centered on domestic issues – such as the economy, cost of living, goods and services taxes, and immigration – but there has been no contestation of defense policies and the need for national service. This suggests that there is strong domestic consensus on the country's defense and military policies. In an interesting twist, national service has now been accepted to such an extent as a Singaporean institution that it has become the subject of intense debate, sparked off by reactions to the government's perceived liberal immigration policies. With new migrants from India and China taking up citizenship in Singapore, many locals have questioned whether these new citizens could be called 'Singaporeans' if they are not required to do national service (Yeoh 2004). Recognizing this as an

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issue that struck at the heart of what it meant to be Singaporean, the prime minister reiterated that every year hundreds of foreign-born youths do their national service as new citizens or permanent residents.[15] Overall, it became evident quickly that the priorities of the new prime minister remained essentially similar to those of his predecessors – nation-building, economic growth, security, and social and political stability. While institutions and systems were tinkered with in response to new internal and international challenges, the fundamentals of the state have remained unchanged – PAP dominance, an efficient civil service, and strong armed forces. Just as Lee had symbolically dropped the use of his military rank a few years before he became prime minister, his former association with the SAF did not feature significantly in his policies.

Paradoxically, the movement of former generals to national leadership has had the effect of reducing tensions between an increasingly sophisticated and professional force and its political masters. In the view of the SAF elite, decisions that would impact on its professional interests – manpower, firepower, and technological advancement – are better entrusted to ministers and senior civil servants who have a good grasp of military operational and tactical realities. The current defense minister (and now deputy prime minister as well) underscores this point. His appointment demonstrates a maturing of the civil–military nexus in Singapore, with a former rear admiral now in charge of developing the armed forces within the larger framework of civilian-dominated national politics. A major decision taken by the minister, and obviously endorsed by the prime minister and his cabinet, was the reduction of national service by six months, from two and half to two years. On the surface, this may have been regarded as detrimental to the manpower requirements of the army, where conscripts account for a large part of its rank and file. But with the technology-based concept of the 'third generation' SAF in place, the military could be assured that shortening the period of full national service obligations would not compromise the capacity and efficacy of the armed forces.[16]

Conclusion

The fusion model – which I have posited previously and reinforced in this chapter – is premised on the continuance of the administrative–political structure put together by the PAP government since the 1960s. Although the political dominance of the PAP appears absolute and unchallenged at this point, the question remains: What would happen to the state and its relations with the military should the PAP suffer an unexpected defeat at the polls? As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Lee Kuan Yew answered that question in 2009. He believes that the civilian institutions are sufficiently resilient to ensure that 'fundamental change' can take place within the framework of the existing political regime, without the need for military intervention. But does this rule out the possibility that the military will intervene to keep the PAP in power? Given that civil–military relations in Singapore are not shaped by the same dynamics prevalent in communist one-party states, in which the army is the military arm of the party, the nexus between the SAF and PAP is by no means institutionally anchored. Although the military now

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functions as an integral part of an administrative state apparatus dominated by the PAP, the armed forces and the party are neither structurally nor ideologically linked. The SAF is a national armed force whose loyalty is formally pledged to the nation, not to a political party. In Singapore, unlike in Vietnam, party symbols are absent in the military, and neither the officer corps nor the rank and file is subjected to PAP indoctrination. In leadership, organization, and doctrine, there is no evidence that the military and the party are wedded. Thus, in the unlikely event that an alternative party should be elected to power, the SAF's relationship with the government would in all probability remain unaffected if the overall political system stays intact. In any case, as a conscript force, the SAF would not find it easy to suddenly take on an interventionist political role even if opportunities presented themselves.

In summary, the SAF is a highly professional force but lacks the socio-political significance of many of its Southeast Asian counterparts. It is large in proportion to the country's size and population, and it remains distinct from the other branches of the state. Yet it exhibits none of the political ambitions that usually come with large, powerful militaries. Rather than chafing at the tight control to which it has been subjected since 1965, the military elite is quite happy to 'merge into the administrative framework of the state' (Khong 1995: 119). This is in large measure due to the unique pattern of civil–military relations in Singapore, in which the SAF has systematically been coopted and fused into the bureaucracy of the state. The form and content of civil–military relations in Singapore is defined largely by a set of ideological and structural norms laid down by a PAP government that has enjoyed uninterrupted power since 1959. Strict structural controls have been imposed on the military from the start, and the armed forces that evolved in the wake of independence were above all a citizens' army whose instincts were more cosmopolitan than puritan. This has precluded the establishment of a military mindset or a clearly defined set of corporate interests on the part of the soldiers. With a security doctrine that depends as much on diplomacy as deterrence, the role of the SAF is clearly subsumed under a broad strategy predicated upon civilian control. The absence of substantial changes in Singapore's civil–military relations since 2001, then, is a reflection of the overall stability of the PAP government and its underlying bureaucratic and economic structures. Until the country is faced with the (unlikely) scenario of grave political decay and economic decline, leading to social unrest and a serious loss of legitimacy for civil institutions, the relationship between the armed forces and the civilian elite will most likely persist in its present state for years to come.

Notes

1 Singaporean author Catherine Lim posed the question to Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew at the 5th Anniversary Dinner of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore. See report in The *Straits Times*, 3 September 2009.

2 'Speech by Minister of Defense, Teo Chee Hean, Parliamentary Debate, 29 February 2008', available online at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events.html

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3 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 January 1983.
4 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 January 1983.
5 'Prime Minister's National Day Message', Prime Minister's Office, 2005.
6 With considerable enhanced capabilities – buttressed by the acquisition of military hardware and Singapore's burgeoning industrial base – the SAF believed by the mid-1980s it not only had the capability of repelling an attack from an external aggressor but 'will be around to pick up the pieces at the end'. More recently, the SAF has openly declared that should deterrence and diplomacy fail, it now has the capability to win a 'swift and decisive victory over the aggressor'.
7 'Speech by Minister of State, Koo Tsai Kee, Parliamentary Debate, February 2008', available online at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events.html
8 'Speech by Teo Chee Hean, Minister of Defense, Parliamentary Debate, 29 February 2008', available online at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events.html
9 *Straits Times*, 1 November 1965.
10 'Ministerial Statement on Recent Deaths of Three SAF Servicemen by Minister of Defence, Parliamentary Sitting, 16 October 2003', available online at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events.html
11 This observation stems from a number of essays written by regular officers in the army journal, *Pointer*, lamenting the erosion of 'institutional moorings' and the proud traditions of the SAF. The SAF, these essays claim, has become less an institution of 'robust military culture' and more a workplace of free market ethos where personal welfare and advancement are stressed over martial values of self-sacrifice.
12 *Straits Times*, 1 February 1996.
13 'Speech by Minister for Defence, 5 June 2004', available online at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events.html
14 *Straits Times*, 7 September 1981.
15 'Speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 16 September 2009', available online at http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews.html
16 'Ministerial Statement, 15 June 2004', available online at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events.html

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Glossary and Abbreviations

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ABRI	*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*, Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia
AFC	Armed Forces Council (Singapore)
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (Burma)
Angkatan Bersenjata	Armed Forces newspaper (Indonesia)
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASDT	*Associação Social Democrática Timor*, Timorese Social Democratic Association
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
Berita Yudhua	War News newspaper (Indonesia)
BGF	Border Guard Forces (Burma)
BIA	Burmese Independence Army
BIN	*Badan Intelijen Negara*, State Intelligence Agency (Indonesia)
BNPT	*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme*, National Anti-Terrorism Agency
BSPP	Burma Socialist Program Party
Bt.	Baht (Thai currency)
CBM	Central Bank of Myanmar
CMR	Civil-Military Relations
CNRM	*Conselho Nacional de Resistência Maubere*, National Council of Maubere Resistance (Timor-Leste)
CNRT	*Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense*, National Council for Timorese Resistance
CP	Chareon Pokphand Group (Thailand)
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CRRN	*Conselho Revolucionária de Resistência Nacional*, Revolutionary Council of National Resistance (Timor-Leste)
CSAFP	Chief of Staff of the AFP
CSIS	Centre for Strategic and International Studies (Indonesia)

DND	Department of National Defense (Philippines)
doi moi	Lit. 'renovation'; economic reforms (Vietnam)
DPR	*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, People's Representative Council (Indonesia)
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
dwifungsi	Dual function (Indonesia)
Estado Novo	Lit. 'New State'; authoritarian regime in Portugal, 1933–1974
Falintil	*Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste*, Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor
FDTL	*Força de Defesa de Timor-Leste*, East Timor Defense Force
F-FDTL	*Falintil-Força de Defesa de Timor-Leste*, Falintil-East Timor Defense Force
firaku	East or easterners of Timor-Leste
Fretilin	*Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente*, Front for the Liberation of East Timor
FULRO	*Front Unifié Pour la Libération des Races Opprimées*, United Front for the Liberation of the Oppressed Races (Vietnam)
GAM	*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, Free Aceh Movement (Indonesia)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPD	General Political Department (Vietnam)
Hukbalahap	People's Army Against the Japanese (Philippines)
hundi	Traditional, legal financial instruments that developed on the Indian sub-continent
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDMC	International Displacement Monitoring Center
IMF	International Monetary Fund
Interfet	International Force for East Timor
ISDS	Institute for Strategic and Development Studies (Philippines)
ISF	International Stabilization Force
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JI	*Jemaah Islamiyah*, lit. 'Islamic group'; terrorist organization (Indonesia)
kaladi	West or westerners of Timor-Leste
Katipunan	Lit. 'association'; Philippine revolutionary society in the 1890s
Kopassus	*Komando Pasukan Khusus*, Special Forces Command (Indonesia)
Kostrad	*Komando Cadangan Strategis Angkatan Darat*, Army Strategic Reserve Command (Indonesia)

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kyat	Currency of Burma
lèse-majesté	Crime of violating majesty
LSI	*Lembaga Survei Indonesia*, Indonesian Survey Institute
MEC	Myanmar Economic Coroporation
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Philippines)
MINDEF	Ministry of Defense (Singapore)
MLF	*Partido Marxista-Leninista Fretilin*, The Marxist-Leninist Party of Fretilin (Timor-Leste)
MOGE	Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise
MPR	*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*, People's Consultative Assembly (Indonesia)
NAP	New Aspiration Party (Thailand)
NDSC	National Defense and Security Council (Burma)
NDSC	National Development Support Command (Philippines)
NISP	National Internal Security Plan (Philippines)
NLD	National League for Democracy (Burma)
NPA	New People's Army (Philippines)
NUS	National University of Singapore
OTOP	One *Tambon* (Sub-district) One Product project (Thailand)
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy (Thailand)
PAP	People's Action Party (Singapore)
PC	Philippine Constabulary
PCHR	Philippine Commission on Human Rights
PD	*Partido Democrático*, Democratic Party (Timor-Leste)
PD	*Partai Demokrat*, Democratic Party (Indonesia)
PDIP	*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle
PDRP	Philippine Defense Reform Program
PKI	*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, Indonesian Communist Party
PNP	Philippine National Police
PNTL	*Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste*, National Police of East Timor
PPP	People's Power Party (Thailand)
PSD	*Partido Sosial Democrata*, Social Democratic Party (Timor-Leste)
Quan Doi Nhan Dan	People's Army newspaper (Vietnam)
RAM	Reform the Armed Forces Movement (Philippines)
Rp.	Rupiah (Indonesian currency)
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SAFOS	SAF Overseas Scholarship (Singapore)
SBPAC	Southern Border Provinces Administration Center (Thailand)
SEATO	Southeast Asian Treaty Organization
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council (Burma)

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SPDC	State Peace and Development Council (Burma)
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Swan Ah Shin	Government-affiliated militia (Burma)
tatmadaw	Burmese Armed Forces
Thai Rak Thai	Thais Love Thais (Thailand)
TKR	*Tentara Keamanan Rakyat*, People's Security Force (Indonesia)
TMB	Thai Military Bank
TNI	*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, Indonesian National Military
UDD	United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (Thailand)
UDT	*União Democratic Timorense*, Timorese Democratic Union
UMEHL	Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited
UN	United Nations
UNMIT	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor
USAFFE	US Armed Forces in the Far East
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association (Burma)
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party (Burma)
Van Nghe Quan Doi	The Army Literature and Arts Magazine (Vietnam)
VCP	Vietnam Communist Party
Viettel	Vietnamese telecommunications company
VPA	Vietnam People's Army
WTO	World Trade Organization

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